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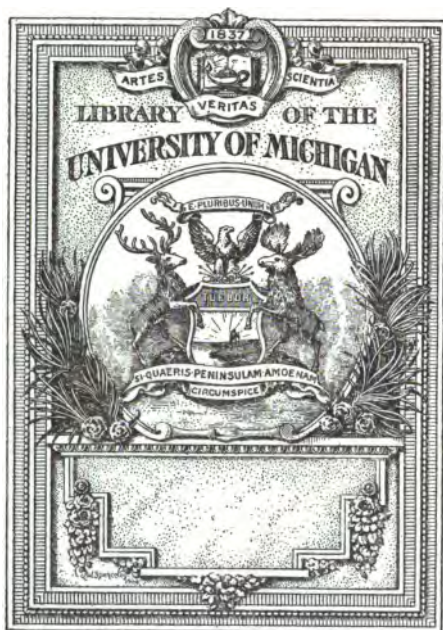
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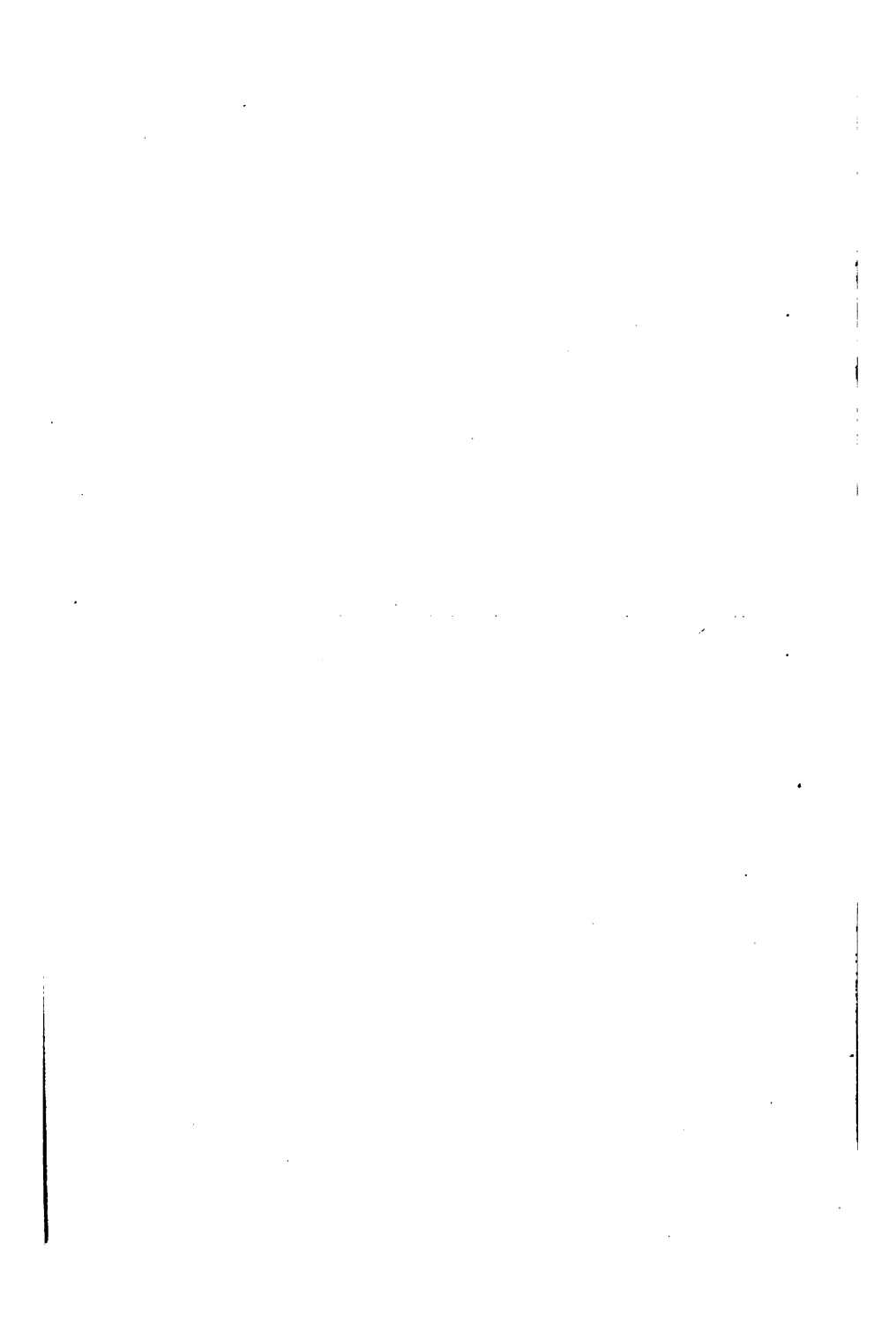
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THE STORY OF HELEN DAVENANT.



THE STORY OF
HELEN DAVENANT.

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BY

VIOLET FANE, =

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"THROUGH LOVE AND WAR," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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TO MY

DEAR AND DISTINGUISHED FRIEND,
ALEXANDER WILLIAM KINGLAKE,

THIS BOOK IS GRATEFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED.



THE STORY OF
HELEN DAVENANT.

CHAPTER I.

I WAS little more than six years old when I was unexpectedly summoned to what proved to be my mother's death-bed. She had been indisposed for a few days only, remaining in her room for the greater part of the morning; but I do not think there could have been any suspicion in the house that her end was approaching. I have since heard that my father, Sir Harry Davenant, a sporting country gentleman of the old

school, had started off early in the morning for the chase, having made arrangements for a reinforcement of hunters, so that he had evidently intended to be absent during the greater part of the day. Also, Mr. Collingwood, a neighbour and friend, had been invited to dine and sleep. Sir Harry was said to be devotedly attached to his wife, and he would certainly not have absented himself from her side if he had been aware that she was in any danger, nor would he have desired to receive even an intimate friend at dinner at so sad a time.

I had been playing alone in my nursery, after a somewhat pensive and desultory fashion, with none of those noisy rompings and scamperings which shake the floors and wear out the carpets of more populous nurseries. I was merely sitting quietly upon the hearth-rug, building up little temples and pyramids with wooden bricks,

and then knocking them down again, without feeling much interest in my occupation. Then Celestine Vigon, my mother's new French maid—who, I remember, was young, dark, and foreign-looking, and wore long gold earrings—appeared at the nursery door, and, after saying a few words, in broken English, to Mrs. Mason, my nurse, led me by the hand to my mother's bed-room, which was situated quite at the other end of the house.

I have heard, since, that my mother was one of the most beautiful women of her day, and I well remember how lovely she appeared, to my childish gaze, on this last occasion on which I beheld her.

She was sitting, propped up by pillows, in the large four-post bed, dressed only in some sort of white wrapper, with her dark hair drawn back from her face, and hanging in long tresses over her shoulders. She

seemed to me to look wonderfully young and girlish for a mother, but she had grown much paler and thinner, I thought, since the morning, and her eyes had an anxious and unhappy expression.

"Look here, little Nelly," she said, as soon as Celestine had left us. "You have always been a dear, obedient little girl. . . . Pay attention to what I'm saying now, for I feel very faint, and can't talk much. Open the side door of that wardrobe there, and do exactly as I tell you."

I went to the wardrobe. It was unlocked, and the door opened quite easily. At first, I could see nothing, inside it, but beautiful evening dresses of many colours, some of which I had seen my mother wearing before she was so much confined to her room.

"Lift up the skirts of those dresses," she said, "and, behind them, you will see a large box."

I did as I was bid, and perceived a square black box, quite at the back of the cupboard. I drew it forward and attempted to lift it.

"Oh, don't do that!" cried my mother from the bed; "it's much too heavy for you! . . . Come here and take this key."

I observed that, as she spoke, she was drawing off a long chain from her neck. A gold key was attached to it, and she handed me both key and chain together.

This act seemed to cost her a supreme effort. She sank back amongst her pillows as though exhausted.

"Push the key into the lock quite straight," she said, by-and-bye. "Press it inwards as far as you can, and then turn it."

What with the darkness of the cupboard, however, which was obscured by a large picture-screen standing to the left of the

bed, and the long chain, which kept on catching in the laces and fringes of the dresses, I found it no very easy matter to do as I was bid.

"Make haste, dear!" exclaimed my mother anxiously, "before Celestine comes back with my soup! She might not like to see you meddling with my things!"

Child as I was, I perceived that she was intensely agitated, and became aware that my mission, whatever it was, must be one of importance.

At last I succeeded in unlocking the box, and lifting up the lid.

"The box has come open," I said, turning to my mother from where I sat on the floor.

She was looking dreadfully pale, and her voice sounded quite feeble as she answered:

"There are two packets just at the top—letters. One of them is tied round with

black ribbon—from your poor uncle Everard, directed to me before I was married; and the other—ah, you can't read!"

She said this in a tone of disappointment—almost of despair.

It was too true! I hung my head in bitter humiliation.

Reading, at this period of my life, seemed to be fraught with insurmountable difficulties, and the mystery of written characters appeared to me to be even more inscrutable than that of printed type.

"You must throw one of those two packets into the fire," continued my mother earnestly, "before Celestine comes back, and see that it is quite burnt up, and then lock up the box and don't say anything about it to anybody. Bring me the letters that have got red seals on them here."

I found the two packets, compared them carefully, and observed that the letters in

the thickest packet—that which was not tied round with black ribbon—were all of them sealed with red wax.

“There is a little horse with wings upon the seals,” I said, when I had finished examining them.

“Quick! quick!” gasped my mother, “or it will be too late! Bring me them here, and let me look at them.”

But the split-ring, upon the long gold chain, had become entangled in the black ribbon binding the smaller packet, and my hurry seemed only to make my childish fingers the more helpless and awkward. I daresay, however, that not more than two or three minutes elapsed, in reality, before I had achieved my purpose, and stood, with the packet of sealed letters in my hand, at the side of my mother's bed.

I remember that I was so small, at this time, that the bed seemed to rise up before

me like a great snow mountain. My eyes could only just have come above the level of the counterpane.

I was an impressionable child, and my hands trembled with excitement. I felt that, for the first time in my short life, I had been entrusted with something important and mysterious, and I was swelling with consequential pride at the notion of having been unmistakeably useful to the being I loved and respected most upon earth.

But, just as I was expecting words of commendation and approval, I was disappointed to find that my mother had, apparently, either fainted, or fallen into a deep sleep.

Feeling somewhat uncertain with regard to her directions, and fearing lest Celestine might return before I had fulfilled them to the letter, I called softly to her. She did not reply.

I raised my voice, but still she remained silent.

I now fancied that I heard the peculiar squeaking sound made by the swing-door at the end of the passage. Celestine must be returning, I thought, with the soup; so, finding that it was impossible to awaken my mother, I hastily decided upon a plan of action.

Until now I had not felt sure which of the two packets was to be consigned to the flames. But, after summoning all my wits to my aid, I arrived at what I thought must be the right conclusion. My mother had requested that the letters with the pretty red seals should be brought to her in her bed. These then, without doubt, were those she desired to preserve, whilst the letters of my poor uncle Everard—her only brother, who had been killed in the Crimean War—were, for some mysterious reason, to be immediately destroyed.

There was not a moment to be lost, for I could hear what I conceived to be Celestine's footsteps approaching rapidly.

A bright fire was burning in the wide, old-fashioned grate. I dived into the cupboard for the second time, brought forth my uncle Everard's letters, and running to the fire-place cast them, bound together as they were, into "the burning fiery furnace."

After all, the approaching footsteps were not those of Celestine. They passed by the door and went on to the end of the passage. One of the other servants, probably. This gave me a little more time for reflection.

I had left the other packet of letters upon the outside of the bed. It now occurred to me that, by placing them inside the coverlid, close to one of my mother's hands, she would find what she had asked for immediately upon

awakening. I acted upon this impulse at once, and I had scarcely re-locked the black box, when I was again aware of the squeaking of the swing-door.

This time it was really Celestine with the soup, for I could hear the cup rattling against the saucer as she approached the door.

When she re-entered the room, the cupboard presented its usual appearance, and I had just had time to slip the gold chain, with the key, inside the bed-clothes, within easy reach of my mother's hand.

As Celestine opened the door I saw Mason, my nurse, standing just outside it, wearing her bonnet and shawl. She beckoned to me, and, knowing that it was past the hour for my accustomed afternoon walk, I went to her at once.

As soon as I had been warmly wrapped up in my new winter pelisse, we proceeded

by way of the avenue towards one of the lodge gates.

Mason seemed, I thought, to be unusually preoccupied, and beyond a few conventional phrases, such as nurses are in the habit of addressing to their youthful charges, she spoke but little.

I, too, after a childish fashion, was preoccupied. I was thinking of the mysterious service I had just been called upon to render my mother, and wondering why she should have been so anxious to destroy my uncle Everard's letters before the return of Celestine.

Since that time, many musings and conjectures have possessed me when thinking over the events of this day, and I have found myself wondering whether there would have been any very marked difference in the ordering of my destiny if, instead of burning the letters that were bound round

with black ribbon, I had been mercifully inspired to do away with those that were sealed with the red seals. Upon such problems, however, it is vain to speculate.

My mother's death occurred towards the middle of the month of December. The day was fine and somewhat frosty. There had been sunshine in the morning, but by the time that Mason and I set out for our afternoon walk, the best of the day was over. Upon arriving at the lodge, therefore, my nurse decided that we should go no further.

As we turned to retrace our steps I saw Tom Pearse, one of Sir Harry's grooms, riding towards us at full speed. The home of my childhood was situated amongst the beechwoods of a line of down, extending for some miles along the sea-coast, and the roadway of the avenue, as well as the garden-walks, was strewn with sifted sea-

shingle instead of the ordinary inland gravel. A horse passing over this quickly, produced a kind of crisp, metallic, crunching sound, which I can always summon at will to my mind's ear. More especially can I recall the impression caused by the sound of it upon this particular day—together with the sudden manner in which Tom reined in his horse with a heightening of the shoulders, and one or two uncomfortable bumpings upon the saddle, when he came to the lodge and shouted out "Gate!"

This Tom Pearse was rather a favourite of mine. He had charge of my new pony, and it was his custom to conduct me to its loose-box whenever I went to the stables to pat and feed my little pet.

I ran back to the gate now, perceiving that he seemed in so great a hurry, and pushed it open for him, assisted by my nurse. Before proceeding upon his way, he

called her to him, and leaning down, muttered something in a low voice. I could only catch the word "doctor" from where I was standing. He put spurs to his horse as soon as he got outside upon the high road, and was quickly out of sight.

Mason appeared to be a good deal perturbed by what he had told her. She said nothing about it to me, however, and we continued our homeward way in silence.

Upon entering the house, my nurse proceeded at once upstairs, instead of lingering with me, as she usually did, before a large cage of goldfinches and canaries which stood in the hall close to the entrance of my mother's sitting-room.

I was an only child and a spoilt one, and was allowed at this time to do very much as I liked; so, having provided myself with plantain and chickweed during my walk, I remained in the hall feeding

the birds instead of following my nurse upstairs.

Matthews, the old butler, looking glum and pompous as usual, came twice into the hall whilst I was standing by the birdcage. He went to the front-door, looked out, and appeared to listen. Probably this was about the hour at which he expected my father to return.

Whilst I was feeding the birds, I thought a great deal about my mother, but I did not feel the slightest anxiety as to her condition. I imagined, in those early days, that all deaths were of necessity violent. The stories Mason used to read to me—"Who Killed Cock Robin?" "Toodle-cum-too and the Hungry Tom-cat," "Jack the Giant-Killer," "Blue-Beard," and others of the same sort, served to confirm me in this opinion. I fancied that people died because they were shot with arrows, devoured by

wild beasts, or had their heads cut off. Of the tranquil and unexpected passing away of the spirit, the falling into the eternal slumber whilst lying comfortably in a soft white bed, I had had, as yet, no experience whatsoever, and I regarded an illness as merely one of the necessary preliminaries to getting well.

Before I had left my place at the bird-cage, I again detected the peculiar sound caused by the approach of horses' hoofs upon the shingle. I ran to the door, and perceived my father returning by precisely the opposite direction to that which Tom Pearse had taken about half-an-hour ago. He was accompanied by a friend, called George Collingwood—the eldest surviving son of our neighbour, Lord Silchester—the friend who had been invited to dine and sleep.

They both wore red coats, and as they

emerged together from under the dark evergreens, which formed an archway over the road, I was struck, young as I was, by the picturesqueness of their appearance. I was under the impression, at this period, that Mr. Collingwood was my parents' dearest and truest friend, because, ever since I could remember anything at all, he had visited us from time to time, and had always been welcomed with cordiality.

Besides this, he was my godfather—and I had been christened "Helen Collingwood." I regarded him, in fact, like a member of our own family, and his visits—laden as he invariably was, with the most delightful presents for me—were always occasions for rejoicing. He was engaged in diplomacy, and attached, at this time, to one of our Embassies abroad. This did not prevent him, however, from frequently visiting his

native land. His father was an old man, and he was a dutiful and attentive son. Several times during the year, and almost invariably at Christmas, he used to return to the home of his boyhood; and upon these occasions I think that we saw almost as much of him as Lord Silchester himself. He came frequently to luncheon and dinner. Sometimes he would remain all night, and he always passed some part of the time playing with me in the nursery.

I went to the front door now—opened it, and ran out to welcome the returning hunters. Sir Harry, when he came back from riding, used sometimes to set me up in front of him on his horse, and take me a few turns up and down, before dismounting. It was for this treat that I was hoping now. My father was talking and laughing with Mr. Collingwood, and gesticulating with his hunting-crop.

"Well, little woman!" he called out to me, in cheery tones, "how's 'mama'?"

But, before I had time to reply, I saw Matthews, of whom I stood in great awe, coming towards us from the house.

He went up to my father, and said something. My father uttered an exclamation, and let the reins drop upon his horse's neck. Matthews then made what was evidently the same communication to Mr. Collingwood, with very much the same result. The horses seemed to pull up of their own accord at the front door, and Matthews assisted my father to dismount. Mr. Collingwood dismounted likewise, and gave the reins to the coachman, who was in waiting.

My father held out his hand towards him with a gesture like that of a despairing man who craves for a friend's sympathy. Mr. Collingwood wrung it in silence. Both

he and Sir Harry were looking as pale as death, and they went up the steps together, hand in hand, staggering like drunken men.

I know now—for I have mingled with my own childish reminiscences much that is the result of after-knowledge—that although my mother had, by this time, breathed her last, Matthews had not ventured to tell my father that she was really dead, dreading the effect which might have been produced upon him by the suddenness of the news, and preferring to leave this responsibility to the doctor, who was momentarily expected. He had, however, informed Sir Harry and Mr. Collingwood that she had become rapidly worse during the afternoon—that she appeared to be gradually sinking, and was now unconscious. Notwithstanding this caution on the butler's part, the effect produced upon

my father by the intelligence he had just received was distressing in the extreme. Matthews and Mr. Collingwood — who seemed also terribly affected—had to almost carry him upstairs. He walked as if his limbs had suddenly been turned into lead.

I followed close behind them, frightened and wondering, and saw them all three go down the passage to the door of my mother's bed-room.

Matthews opened the door a little way, and seemed to be gently thrusting my father into the apartment. He appeared to shrink, however, from going into the room alone. Twice I saw him reel backwards from the door. Then, as if summoning all his courage, he clutched Mr. Collingwood by the shoulder, as though for support, and the two went together into the chamber of death.

Matthews came down the passage soon

afterwards. I looked at him appealingly, hoping that he would tell me what had happened. He took no notice of me, however, but marched solemnly on. His face looked vacant and inscrutable, and I felt too awed and frightened to question him.

As soon as he was out of sight I went down the passage, and hovered outside my mother's room, longing, and yet not daring, to enter.

In a few minutes the door opened.

"Leave me alone with her, George," I could hear my father saying, in a broken voice—"I feel that I can bear it now," and Mr. Collingwood came out into the passage.

He seemed to be breathing very hard, but it was nearly dark now, so that I could not see the expression of his face.

He perceived me when he came to where

I was standing—caught me up in his arms, and kissed me passionately. When he set me down again, I felt that my cheeks were quite wet, as if with tears.

CHAPTER II.

My mother, I have heard, had been united to Sir Harry Davenant when she was barely twenty, he being her senior by precisely this number of years. She apparently married him chiefly on account of his importunity. He had proposed to her several times and had been refused; but it seems that his ardour would brook no denial. The marriage, however, was said to have been a happy one. At the time of my mother's death they had been married about ten years, my birth having taken place some three years after their union.

In common with most of the owners of entailed property, Sir Harry had hoped for a son to inherit his name and estates. Up to this time, however, there seemed to be no reason why this hope should not be gratified, and, in the meanwhile, I do not think he could have petted and indulged me more than he did, even if I had been a boy.

Failing a son, the house and estate of Northover Park were settled upon my first cousin, Courtenay Davenant, at this time a schoolboy in his teens. I had a dim recollection of a boy who came to us once, a long time ago, to spend his holidays, but could remember no more about him than that he had arrived upon a wet day, wearing a short jacket, no overcoat, a high hat and black kid gloves, and that having had, I suppose, reason to rub his nose, the damp gloves had made a black mark upon it, of

which he was totally unaware, and so bore himself with great dignity notwithstanding. He must have been in mourning for his father at this time, and hence, probably, the black kid gloves. I have no doubt that he may have visited Northover both before and after this, but I could only recall this one occasion amongst the very earliest of my recollections.

It was only natural that so sudden a calamity as that which had befallen my father, should have affected him painfully. But its consequences were totally different from what might have been expected. From the day of his young wife's death, Sir Harry Davenant become altogether a changed man. Grief, which, with most sensitive natures, is prone to soften the heart and enlarge the sympathies, seemed, in his case, to have produced a directly contrary effect. It was as though his whole being had sud-

denly become hardened and demoralized, and the transition was made to appear the more surprising and, unaccountable, from the fact of his having quitted England immediately after my mother's funeral, whither he did not return for the space of nearly two years, transformed, as I have just remarked, into an utterly new creature.

When, upon the day of my mother's death, Sir Harry had ridden home from hunting with Mr. Collingwood, a more genial, pleasant-looking country gentleman it would have been scarcely possible to behold. He must have been hard upon fifty at this time, but he appeared to be a good deal younger. He was tall and somewhat heavily built; his features were, perhaps, rather too massive and undefined to be positively handsome, but he had a frank, rosy, clean-shaved, English face, merry grey eyes, and a set of magnificent

teeth. In a word, his whole aspect was jovial, hearty, and prepossessing.

How am I to describe the changed being who returned, two years afterwards, from abroad, without seeming to exaggerate?

This new man was tall and large-framed it is true, but yet not seeming nearly so tall as my father, several inches of his height being sacrificed to a decided stoop, and he was so thin that his clothes appeared to have all become too big for him. He had grown a coarse straggling beard, which entirely altered the character and proportion of his face, and his curly dark hair was now thin and grizzled. His eyes were hollow and bloodshot, and had a restless, suspicious expression, entirely at variance with their frank, fearless, gaze, in the past. One might have imagined that he was either suffering from the remorse consequent upon some hidden crime, or that he was con-

scious of being undermined by some fatal disease.

So much for the change which had taken place in his appearance. Alas, in disposition he had altered even more than in face !

He had become surly, morose, and uncommunicative ; went out usually at twilight, or else so early in the morning as to run no chance of falling in with any of his former neighbours and friends, for he seemed to have grown suspicious and mistrustful of everybody. He would ride sometimes — after a reckless, purposeless fashion — tiring out several horses in the course of the same day ; at others, he would not stir out of doors once during the week. He went to bed at odd times ; sitting up, generally, for more than half the night in a subterranean portion of the house where he had now established himself, and which was as far as possible from the cheerful apart-

ments he had inhabited with my poor mother. In fact, it was as though everything that could remind him of his dead wife, instead of inspiring him with sentiments of tender regret, had grown positively hateful to him.

Towards myself, for instance, he no longer manifested the slightest affection. When, thinking to rouse him from his fits of solitary musing, the faithful Mason would take me to pay him a visit in his gloomy retreat, he used, generally, to order me up again to my nursery, in tones that filled me with terror, or else, upon occasions when he suffered me to stay with him, he would take no notice of me whatsoever, but remain moodily writing at his table, or sitting with his head buried in his hands. It soon became painfully evident to his household that there existed another cause for Sir Harry's altered manner and appearance

besides the grief which was presumably gnawing at his heart. In order, no doubt, to escape from the melancholy regrets which crowded upon him in his desolation my father had taken to drinking. In the past, it seems, he had had some tendency this way, which my mother's refining influence had been enabled to restrain within the limits of convivial joviality. Bad habits, however, like ill-weeds, "grow apace," and now that this restraint was removed, he seemed to have entirely lost all power of self-control. In the evening, in fact, he was scarcely ever sober, and his temper, when he was under this baneful and degrading influence, became violent and irritable in the extreme.

This painful state of things increased as I grew in stature, until, by the time that I was ten years old, my father was generally spoken of in the neighbourhood as "poor

Sir Harry," whilst his former friends would tap their foreheads significantly whenever they had occasion to mention his name.

CHAPTER III.

I WILL pass over the uneventful days of my childhood, and resume my narrative at the period when I was between sixteen and seventeen years of age.

Ever since I was about thirteen I had had a governess—Miss Warden by name; my existence, consequently, from this time, had been much less desolate.

I do not know who could first have suggested to Sir Harry that a governess would be essential to my welfare—my welfare appeared now to concern him so very little. He held no kind of communication with

any of our neighbours, at the same time he seemed to be hardly rational enough to have evolved the notion from his own brain. Perhaps he may have received an application or recommendation upon the subject from some one who pitied my forlorn condition, and as he was now frequently absent from home, it may have occurred to him, in a lucid interval, that if he secured the services of some lady who could serve as my chaperon and instructress, he would save himself both trouble and responsibility in the future.

Miss Warden, at this time, was a lady of what is termed "an uncertain age," between thirty-five and forty-five, that is to say, as far as I could judge by her appearance. She was plain, both in figure and feature, but with a plainness which was not in the least displeasing. She had large, kind, brown eyes, an irregular nose, a swarthy

complexion, and a wide mouth, which, however, seemed to be always smiling.

What a gushing, enthusiastic, tender-hearted creature she was! Many people, I daresay, might have called her a foolish woman. Her very womanliness, however, stood her in good stead sometimes, enabling her, through a sort of intuitive feminine instinct (given us, as she was wont to inform me, in order to protect us from man—though I hardly think that she could have had much need of any such protection), to arrive at tolerably correct conclusions without the aid of reason.

Her worst failing was, perhaps—seeing that I possessed the same weakness myself, and that she was in the position of my mentor—that she was so incorrigibly romantic, and expectant for ever of some dramatic and sensational occurrence. As yet, indeed, there had been little in her life

at Northover to justify these expectations, but, failing the combinations and complications which are usually favourable to the development of romantic situations, she would fasten eagerly upon the very scantiest food in order to minister to this insatiable craving. We could not fall in with the village apothecary during our walks, or receive a visit from the new curate, without a declaration upon her part that "the plot" was "decidedly thickening," whilst an excusable personal vanity, mingling with the sincere affection she bore me, caused her to regard as imminent the advent of handsome and desirable suitors for us both.

Our days, at about this time, were ordered somewhat after the following fashion :—

Supposing that the weather was fine, we generally repaired out of doors soon after breakfast, where I went through as many

of my studies as could be conveniently pursued there, in an old-fashioned summer-house (a favourite resort, as I was told, of my poor mother's), at one end of the terraced flower-garden. Then we returned to the house, where I used to practice music and drawing, in which accomplishments I soon out-distanced my instructress, having some natural taste for the arts to which she had only been driven by the requirements of her calling. She had not much love, I fancy, either, for serious study, and our holidays and half-holidays proved greater treats to her than they did to me. She was cheerful and sociable by nature, delighting in conversation and gossip, whereas, at this time, I was somewhat inclined towards solitude. But for the voluminous letters which she was in the habit of writing home to an aged mother, however, I doubt whether I should have

been often able to indulge myself in this respect. I was very fond of day-dreaming and castle-building. My mind seemed, at this time, to be teeming with all sorts of fantastic and picturesque visions, and I liked to have leisure to dwell upon these, and to set them in some kind of order.

I was enabled to arrive at this end in two ways, supposing that the weather favoured my designs.

I was enthusiastically fond of riding, whilst, next to my poor father (of whom she had always stood in the greatest terror), and after dogs, cows, oxen, and all horned creatures, Miss Warden's keenest apprehensions seemed to be associated with the horse. She had never ridden in her life, and felt nervous, she said, in every kind of vehicle excepting an omnibus. By ordering my horse, therefore, I could always escape from my governess's amiable prattle. At other

times, when I experienced this inordinate craving for solitude and self-examination, I used to sally forth, whilst Miss Warden was writing home, laden with my drawing materials; and, once out of doors, I would plunge into the most inaccessible thicket, or make my way towards that part of the park which was furthest from the house, thus effectually eluding my governess when she came out to seek for me.

During these solitary rides and rambles—for my old friend Tom Pearse, promoted now to the place of coachman, only accompanied me riding when I went outside the park, or in a direction where there were gates to open—I used to muse upon a variety of different subjects.

From the moment when I had at length mastered the mystery of reading, I devoured, with the greatest avidity, most of the romances which I found in the well-

stocked library at Northover House. Some of these I did not wholly comprehend at the time, some, perhaps, it would have been better had I never comprehended at all.

Having begun by poring eagerly over such works as treated of brigands, ghosts, knight-errants, and perilous adventures, I had come, as I advanced towards woman's estate, to prefer those of a more natural kind, descriptive of events which did not seem to be too improbable of occurrence. I delighted in passionate love-scenes, and usually became desperately enamoured of the hero of my book very soon after making his acquaintance. In this respect, indeed, I was dangerously susceptible, and terribly unfaithful as well, to my book-loves, my heart often warming towards more than one character in the same novel. I remember that I was in love with "Ivanhoe," for

instance, and the Knight Templar, in spite of his lawless ferocity, at the same time. "The Master of Ravenswood," I confess, reigned, whilst he reigned at all, supreme in my affections; but I succumbed, very soon afterwards, to the brutal fascinations of "Mr. Rochester" (so rarely alluded to as "Edward" by the humble little heroine!), upon his black horse "Mesrour," and was never in the least surprised that "Jane Eyre" should have preferred him—mad wife and all—to the saintly and ascetic St. John, so egotistically intent upon the salvation of his own soul! "Eugene Aram," however, supplanted him before long in my affections. I remember how miserable I felt when he was found dead in his prison cell, and that my melancholy was greatly intensified by the knowledge that his tragical story was founded upon fact.

So I used to read on and on, identifying myself, to an almost painful degree, with the joys and sorrows of these and of many other creatures of the imagination. I liked my books, at this time, to be long, in order that I might become thoroughly acquainted with the personages described, and would toil through romances which I have found it impossible even to skim at a later period—books which would rejoice the heart, no doubt, of some shipwrecked Crusoe, with unlimited time upon his hands, if they could be cast on shore with the tinned meats, but for the reading of which the crowded and hurried days of an ordinary existence seem to be hardly long enough.

I had a decided preference for heroes about whom there clung any shadow of mystery—of weirdness—or the suspicion of undiscovered crime. I liked to read of how they shrank from giving their guilty right

hands in greeting, or went about, chiefly at midnight, shrouded in long black cloaks, and to feel that they were living under some sort of terrible ban.

The romantic and impressionable Miss Warden was the last person in the world to check this somewhat dangerous leaning, which was, I hope, rather the result of an active and vivid imagination than of any morbid craving for sensational horrors. She shared, in truth, the same weakness herself, and was, moreover, a sincere believer in ghosts, omens, and all those incomprehensible marvels which are spoken of, incongruously, as "the supernatural."

She used frequently to tell my fortune as well as her own, with cards, in order to penetrate the veil in which our future was shrouded. To do her justice, she seemed to be quite as anxious for my happiness and prosperity as for her own. I never com-

pletely mastered her manner of proceeding, although I have listened hundreds of times to her predictions, for, unless anything she said came like a response to what was already in my mind, I did not pay much attention to her prophetic utterances or to the method employed.

As far as I can remember, however, after shuffling the cards, she would give them into my hands and ask me to wish. After wishing, I used to cut them and hand them back to her, and she would then spread them out upon the table, sometimes massed together in a compact square, sometimes in the form of a fan ; after which she would begin to count, a performance which had to be repeated several times.

I, meanwhile, sat pencil in hand, ready to set down upon paper what fell from the lips of the sybil. I came upon one of these scraps of paper quite recently, as I was

looking over some old letters. The predictions recorded upon it must have been written down soon after this time, and by referring to it I am enabled to give the reader some notion of Miss Warden's system.

"One, two, three, four, five" (she would say, tapping each successive card with the tip of a paper-knife, which she used as a diviner's rod). "Ah! here is yourself, surrounded by company, chiefly composed of women; not all of them are well-disposed towards you. Some of them seem to be jealous,—but here is a fair man (king of hearts) with most excellent intentions! One, two, three, four, five. Yes! He is very well off—a bachelor—did not make his money, but inherited it—spends it freely—chiefly upon himself—a man with a title—occupies a distinguished position abroad" (counting). "Ah! I thought so!

He loves you tenderly! A powerful and devoted friend — would do anything to obtain your affection. More devoted, at present, to you than you are to him. But now who is this other man just at his elbow?" (counting). "Ah! the influence of this man will not be beneficial to you! He is a man of double character, and utterly unscrupulous! He will exercise a sinister effect upon your destiny if you permit him to become involved with it" (counting). "Yes! He appears to be mixed up, or connected, in some way, with the heart king, through a diamond woman of a very evil disposition.

"These two men seem to be staying in the same house, and you appear to be there too, but the house is not your own home. Possibly you may go somewhere on a visit, or be invited to some kind of entertainment, for I find you in the midst of company

again. Now for your wish!" (counting). "It has something to do with these two fair kings. The diamond man seems, somehow, to act as an impediment. Much delay and vexation in store for you before you can obtain it. Several long journeys. A shorter journey first, with marriage at the end of it (there, you see, is the ring). Journeying again, from place to place—not altogether pleasant journeys. Great surprise!" (counting) "of a very unpleasant and tragical nature—(Do look at all those horrid black cards!)—having to do with fair man, who is surrounded by the worst cards. I must see what all this means" (counting). "Yes, extremely unpleasant disclosures! Vexations and humiliations, followed by death of a spade man in good position, who is in some way related to you, but has become estranged—possibly your poor papa. More journeys. Illness. Another death. Brilliant

assemblages. Tragic death of a fair man, which will prove the greatest relief to you. Same diamond woman with evil heart, who is related to fair man, to be particularly mistrusted. She will do you an injury if she can. Her machinations are abominable. Wish is connected with club king, who will have recently changed his title and his house. Obstacles. Scandals and backbitings. Another great surprise. More journeyings. Final triumph, with realisation of wish," &c. &c. &c.

With so many varied incidents to select from, it was not to be wondered at, perhaps, if some of these random sentences may have seemed, later on, to have had about them the ring of true prophecy.

CHAPTER IV.

AND George Collingwood—my god-father, my parents' dear friend, the man who, upon the occasion of my poor mother's death, had wetted my infant cheek with his tears—had he never crossed our threshold since that ever-to-be-remembered day? Not to my knowledge. It is probable that Sir Harry, who could not fail, when in his presence, to be reminded of one of the most miserable days of his life, may have purposely avoided bringing about a meeting with him. Then, too, Mr. Collingwood, after acting as secretary of Embassy at several European

courts, had been appointed minister somewhere in South America—a post which he had accepted with reluctance, and merely as a stepping-stone to something nearer home, for his father was now a very old man, and he was anxious not to continue so far away from him. In a few years he was fortunate enough to get transferred to a more eligible post, but he was too far off, even now, to make it easy for him to visit our neighbourhood very often; it was not wonderful, therefore, if I had never seen him at Northover since the sad occasion to which I have referred.

Twice, however, during one of his flying visits to England, I had fallen in with him during my afternoon ride.

Upon the first occasion I was returning home, after having been to our nearest town, when he overtook me, riding, likewise, upon the turnpike road. I had a good memory,

and he seemed to me to be but little altered. All the same, I am not sure whether I should have recognised him as I passed, had he not followed and greeted me first. I was about fifteen or sixteen at this time, I should think, so that about ten years had elapsed since our last meeting. Tom Pearse, however, in the Davenport livery, was riding behind me, so that it could not have required much effort on his part to guess who I might be.

The affection I had felt for Mr. Collingwood when I was quite a little girl, seemed to rush back into my heart when I looked into his face, and saw his eyes seeking mine with an unmistakeable expression of tender emotion. He talked about old times, reminded me of the famous romps that we used to have in the old nursery, inquired whether my father was now at Northover, made no allusion whatever to my mother,

and then parted with me at the lodge-gate, after informing me that I was not in the least changed, that he would have known me "amongst a thousand," and that he would make a point of riding the same way upon the following afternoon, in the hope of falling in with me again.

I met him next day, according to his implied desire, and after riding for a short way along the highroad we turned in at a gate which led to a secluded part of his father's park.

Perhaps I ought here to describe the man whose name will have to appear so frequently in this narrative.

At the time of which I am writing, George Collingwood must have been about five-and-forty. He looked however a great deal younger, and, as he rode by my side upon his showy chestnut, I thought him exceedingly handsome. My maturer judg-

ment obliges me to confess, however, that he did not possess what could correctly be termed a handsome feature in his whole face, which owed its great charm to its intelligence and mobility of expression. It seemed, indeed, to be able to say anything he wished to express without the assistance of words, and had the power of looking happier, merrier, or more miserable, than any other face I have since beheld. He was tall and well-built, fair-complexioned, with expressive eyes, hair a little darker than his moustaches,—but for which he was clean shaved,—and was possessed of a particularly insinuating voice, manner, and address. He had the reputation, as I have since heard, of being “utterly irresistible” to women, and was supposed to have broken hearts in almost every capital in Europe. Small wonder, therefore, if *I*, an inexperienced girl of sixteen, found his society

agreeable and fascinating in the highest degree!

He made me feel, before I had been more than ten minutes in his company, that he was really and truly devoted to me, and genuinely delighted to have me riding with him thus, and he possessed the rare charm of *appearing*, at any rate, to be far more interested in my pursuits and aspirations than in anything connected with himself. He asked me a great many questions as to my every-day life; whether I had a governess; whether she was French or English; what studies I preferred; what books I was in the habit of reading; and whether we saw much company at Northover House?

I told him everything he desired to know about my uneventful existence, and informed him that, owing to the unsatisfactory state of my father's health, no visitors ever crossed the threshold of my home. He appeared to be deeply, un-

accountably, interested in all I said, considering—as I thought to myself—how many more important matters he must have had to occupy him. It was a lovely autumnal afternoon, and I enjoyed my ride immensely. We separated, as upon the previous day, at the entrance to Northover Park.

“Now that I’ve discovered all about your manners and customs,” he said, as he bade me farewell, “I’ve no doubt I shall be able to fall in with you, somehow, whenever I run over to England. Don’t quite forget me, dear Helen, in the meantime, for you know that we are very, very old friends!”

He looked at me, as he spoke, with an expression of regretful yearning, which I might, perhaps, have mistrusted had I known, at this time, that he was such a redoubtable “lady-killer”; and then, after wringing my hand very hard, he rode off suddenly, as though he dared not trust himself to say more.

CHAPTER V.

THE next time that we met was upon what proved to be a memorable occasion, as far as I was concerned.

About four or five miles from Northover there lived an old-fashioned couple of the name of Ingleby, at a beautiful old Elizabethan manor-house, known as Ingleby Grange.

Mr. Ingleby was one of our county Members; he was also a master of fox-hounds, and was high sheriff for the year of which I am writing. Besides this, he was a man of large property and considerable wealth;

over and over again he had refused both a baronetcy and a peerage; preferring to be known as plain John Ingleby, like his father and grandfather before him. Nevertheless, he possessed immense influence in the county; and at the time when "poor Sir Harry" had conducted himself like a rational being "Jack Ingleby" had been one of his most intimate friends.

Mr. and Mrs. Ingleby were childless, and well-advanced in years, but they delighted in keeping open house at Ingleby Grange, and were never better pleased than when it was enlivened by the presence of youths and maidens.

When it became known in the neighbourhood that I had arrived at woman's years,—for I am writing now of the summer which followed upon my nineteenth birthday,—Mrs. Ingleby had, more than once, driven over to see me; and, upon the last of these

occasions, which was when my father was again absent from home, she had been loud in her expressions of motherly sympathy for my forlorn condition.

I assured her, speaking with perfect sincerity, that I was not at all discontented with my lot; and that I did not think that I should care for a life of gaiety and excitement. She replied, that it was impossible for me to know, as yet, whether I should like it or not; that I ought to be presented at court, and permitted to see something of the world, for that it was unnatural for a young creature like me to be mewed up in almost total solitude, and then departed,—filled, as I could not fail to perceive, with all kinds of benevolent projects for my future good,—after depositing two of Mr. Ingleby's cards upon the hall-table with due formality. Only a little while afterwards—just at the conclusion of the London season,

as I was informed—but of such times and seasons I knew as yet next to nothing—a Royal Duke, having occasion to visit our neighbourhood for some important function, accepted an invitation to remain for the night at Ingleby Grange. A select company was invited to meet him at dinner; afterwards there was to be a dance, and to this dance Mrs. Ingleby kindly invited both Miss Warden and myself; nor would she listen to any of the objections which I put forward, in my nervousness at the notion of being thus unexpectedly hurried into the world. My father, she said, could surely not disapprove of my going to the house of such very old friends; but my father's objections were not what I feared. He was away from home, as he was almost invariably now, having taken bachelor apartments in London; and he displayed too little interest in me, and my doings, for me to

think of troubling him with a letter upon a subject which he would have considered so trivial and unimportant. What was exercising my mind, in reality, was, whether I could be quite sure of my dancing steps, wherewithal I should be clothed, and how I should find it possible to converse easily with a number of total strangers. Miss Warden, however, who was enchanted at the thought of accompanying me upon the occasion of my first appearance in public, and who prided herself upon her experience in all matters relating to female attire, promised to take all trouble off my hands. A white ball-dress was made for me in London from measurements which she furnished. Mason, my former nurse, who was now my personal attendant, and a most excellent needlewoman, rectified such trifling errors as required attention, and the cards having distinctly foretold, for the second or third

time, that we should meet not only a most brilliant assembly, but also the bachelor heart king and the diamond man of double character, we set off for Ingleby Grange upon the evening of the ball in the highest state of excitement and anticipation.

I fancy that, at this time, I must have been what most people would call pretty ; not because I admired my own face at all, but because of the effect which I perceived at once that it seemed capable of producing upon others—an effect which led me to infer that it must have possessed some sort of charm. I was rather tall for a woman ; my complexion was fair, but my eyes and hair were dark ; and I think I had that kind of unusual appearance which is apt to attract notice in a crowd. Sometimes, I surprised myself, looking very like a portrait of my mother which had been hidden away by Sir Harry in a lumber-room, and upon which I

had chanced one day, when seeking for the large bird-cage that used to stand by her sitting-room door. But her face, as I could remember it in life, seemed to me to have possessed none of the defects which I could perceive in my own.

“You look quite lovely, Helen,” Miss Warden whispered to me (to give me confidence, no doubt) as we entered the ball-room; but then I could hardly regard her as an impartial judge!

Our hostess received me with effusive kindness. The Royal Duke was standing by her side, and I was presented to him at once. His Royal Highness perceiving, no doubt, by reason of my obvious perturbation, that this was my first public appearance, endeavoured to put me at my ease by the affability of his conversation. New guests, however, kept on arriving, entailing fresh presentations, so that it was not long

before I was able to rejoin Miss Warden, who had been hovering near me by the doorway, and who took occasion to remark, that if all Princes possessed the delightful manner of His Royal Highness, "we should never hear anything more of those horrible radicals and republicans. . . . But there are *two* Princes here to-night!" she added triumphantly, as she glanced towards the further end of the long room; "that tall, very handsome young man there, talking to that other man, I have just been told is a prince also; not an English one,—a Russian, or a Wallachian, or a Bulgarian, with a totally unpronounceable name." I looked in the direction indicated, and perceived a tall, distinguished-looking man, wearing several orders upon his breast. He was leaning against a pillar, in conversation with some one whose face I could not see. His appearance struck me

at once, as interesting and imposing. "If you are introduced to him, and if he asks you to dance," whispered my amiable but injudicious chaperon, "I shall feel perfectly certain that he is the 'heart king'!" I danced my first valse with a youth of the neighbourhood, and, in the course of it, found myself at the further end of the room. My partner paused to make a little conversation, and I perceived that we were close to the distinguished foreigner, and that the person with whom he was conversing was none other than my old friend Mr. Collingwood.

My godfather must have been watching my movements, for he came up to me at once.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you," he said, addressing my partner, who was evidently an acquaintance, "but I want to ask Miss Davenant for the pleasure of the next

dance; that is, if she can forgive me my grey hairs?"

I perceived no grey hairs. He looked young and charming as ever, and the sight of him had the effect of immediately restoring my confidence.

When my dance with him was over, the foreign Prince crossed the room, and coming towards us, begged Mr. Collingwood, with whom it appeared he was staying, to introduce him to me, and after this introduction he invited me to dance the next valse.

His name, as Miss Warden had remarked, seemed to be "utterly unpronounceable," nor did I, indeed, make any attempt to pronounce it.

Now that I was nearer to him, I did not think that he looked particularly young. Five-and-thirty, or forty, at least, I should have said, if he had been an Englishman, but then Englishmen have a way of looking

younger for their age than the natives of any other country upon the face of the globe! His hair was so exceedingly light, and colourless, that, at first, I fancied that it must have turned prematurely grey, but his complexion was not of that fresh ruddy kind which is generally the accompaniment of extreme fairness. He had the somewhat lined, and bloodless, look, which, I have since perceived in many of the inhabitants of northern latitudes, where it is customary to pass from the intensity of outward cold to the extremes of artificial heat, and to be alternately nipped by the breath of frosts and parched by the warmth of stoves. His face was short, broad-browed, of rather a Kalmuc type, with high cheek-bones, a straight small nose, heavy fair moustaches, and eyes set somewhat obliquely. They were very handsome eyes, however, utterly different from any other eyes that I had

ever beheld, of a light transparent colour, like green sea-water, singularly luminous and brilliant, with dark lashes and brows, which contrasted oddly, but picturesquely, with his fair hair. I have since thought that his eyes were a little like those of a lynx—bright, fascinating—dominating, by their size, the rest of the countenance, and having in them, now and then, just a gleam of something wild and untamable.

He spoke English perfectly, too well, indeed, for an Englishman, but beyond this extreme correctness of expression, there was nothing in his accent to show that he was a foreigner. He informed me that, as children, he and his only sister had always had French and English governesses, and that he fancied that he knew these two languages, in consequence, almost better than his own, as it had always been his habit, as a boy, to speak in French, and

think in English. He danced beautifully, and seemed, I thought, to be of a very quiet, simple, unpretending nature, speaking seriously, and a little wearily, with the manner of one who has come to the end of the emotional and enthusiastic epoch of existence, and whose interest is concentrated less upon the present than upon the past.

After our dance, he asked me to come with him through the reception-rooms. He was only remaining in England, he said, a few weeks longer, and was anxious to see something of its country-houses, of which he had heard so much.

When we had made the round of the apartments, we came to a tea-room, where he asked for a cup of coffee for himself and for me. We sat down together upon a sofa not far from the doorway, whence we could look down the entire length of the bril-

liantly-lighted rooms. A strange sensation, as of passive subjection to the power of a superior will, seemed to come over me as I listened to the Prince's calm and somewhat monotonous voice.

"In my country, in Poland," he was saying (so he was neither a Russian, a Wallachian, nor a Bulgarian, after all!) "existence is very much more simple than it is here. We live rather after a primitive patriarchal fashion, which is not wanting in a certain picturesqueness. . . . There is what would seem to you, no doubt, a strange mixture of barbarism and magnificence, but we have nothing whatever of your unostentatious comfort—nothing of that kind!"

He waved his hand—which, I noticed, was beautifully shaped—as he spoke, in the direction of the long suite of reception-rooms, and then, looking fixedly in my face,

he said, before I had had time to make any rejoinder :

“ Have you ever been told, mademoiselle, that you were very strongly magnetic, or mediumistic? that you were possessed of remarkable mesmeric power? ”

“ Never! ” I answered, surprised at his words. “ What can have made you fancy this? ”

“ Because I am myself very strongly mesmeric, and I am impressionable, also, in this respect, to an extraordinary degree. I perceived, from the first moment of speaking to you, that I was in the presence of an opposing force. I should be powerless, I imagine, ever to dominate you? ”

“ But you were trying to dominate me? ” I asked, feeling alarmed. “ You were trying some sort of experiment or incantation upon me? I could feel that you were! ”

“ Ah! you could feel it! ” he said, with

quiet satisfaction ; “ then your climate has not deprived me of my most valuable family inheritance ! ”

He smiled dreamily, and then went on stirring and sipping his coffee in silence.

I shall never quite know how much may have been purely imaginary, the mere result of his words, or how much there was of reality in what I now seemed to experience. Certain it was that I again felt a sense of helplessness, an impossibility, almost, of independent physical action. My mind, however, seemed to be fighting against this unusual restraint.

“ My body is in your power somehow,” I felt compelled to avow, “ but my mind is determined to resist you. You cannot get any power over my mind ! ”

“ I wonder if it is so ? ” he murmured, looking at me curiously. “ But *now*, even your physical action is restored to you

again? You can rise up and go wherever you wish, can you not?"

"Yes, I am free now!" I answered, smiling, and giving myself a little shake. "How did you learn such an extraordinary power?"

"It came to me by right of inheritance," he answered. "We were all possessed of it in a greater or lesser degree. It is partly a fiction in our family, mingled with all sorts of fantastic legends, and partly, as you have experienced, a fact. As the members of our race become fewer, so, according to the tradition, does this faculty become the more potent and concentrated with those individuals that remain. Only two of us are living at the present moment, my sister and myself, so that we ought, between us, to possess it in a marked degree."

"And what is it, exactly?" I inquired; "the power of being able to mesmerise

people? You spoke of it just now as a mesmeric power."

"I called it so because I know not how else to describe it. But I rather regard it, myself, as an inherited primitive instinct. We possess still, as a people, many of the characteristics of the uncivilized man, characteristics which were implanted in us, originally, for our own protection, and which have not yet been stifled and overgrown with artificial productions. Just as you find that one dog will carry your stick, that another will dive for a stone, and a third run after a hare; so, also, the primitive races were distinguished by certain physical and mental peculiarities. These, again, became subject to variations in different families. The inheritance of our race has hitherto taken the form of an extraordinary susceptibility, to all spiritual and magnetic influences. We are "*sen-*

sitives," and we recognise at once our relative positions when in the presence of other personalities. Given certain favourable conditions, we are able to dominate and control these others in their volitional power. When the conditions, on the contrary, tell against us, it is all the other way."

Now that he admitted thus, quite openly and honestly, that he could scarcely claim to be considered a really civilised being, I felt that I could forgive him the wild beast look which I fancied I had observed in his eyes. Probably I was only confronting, for a moment, the primitive man!

Before he had time to say more, I saw Mr. Collingwood coming towards us from the ball-room. A curious look, as of vexation, or jealousy, I knew not which, came into his expressive face when he perceived us.

"Well, my dear Hugo," he exclaimed, addressing his Polish friend, "are you aware that you are monopolising the star of the evening, and that half-a-dozen of our 'gilded youth' are pacing up and down in the other room, tearing out their hair in handfuls? I will venture to bet, Miss Helen, that he has been trying to convert you to his views upon mesmerism, spiritualism, and electro-biology, and trying to weave about you all sorts of occult spells. Let me release you from the power of the enchanter!"

He offered me his arm as he finished speaking, and we returned together to the ball-room.

The Prince rose also, and followed behind us, seeming grave and abstracted. I danced again, several times, before the end of the evening, and was conscious that his lynx eyes were fixed upon me all the while.

Mr. Collingwood, I found, had made the acquaintance of Miss Warden, and had taken her into supper, with the view of ascertaining everything about me—as he said. He had thought her a very good natured and pleasant person, with excellent manners.

“But what I like in her best,” he added, “is her evident devotion to you.”

When it was time for us to depart he escorted us to the carriage. Whilst we were waiting for it in the hall, I asked him to tell me the Prince’s correct name.

He repeated it slowly, pronouncing each syllable distinctly: “‘Prince Crecszoleski,’ Christian name, ‘Hugo.’”

“I shall never be able to remember it,” I said; “I wish you could have written it for me.”

He drew a letter from his pocket, tore off a scrap of it, and wrote down the name in pencil.

"Think of the crackling of a bag of biscuits if you happen to lose this," he said, as he handed me the slip of paper.

"The Prince is a most distinguished looking individual," Miss Warden remarked in the course of our homeward drive, "but I must say there is, to my mind, something a little 'Eugene Aramy' about him. Probably, however, this is only because he is a conspirator. All the Poles, I believe, are conspirators, and belong to secret societies for assassinating the Russians. The plot is decidedly thickening!"

CHAPTER VI.

WHILST I was dressing, next morning, my mind was filled with impressions connected with my first ball, amongst which the Polish Prince had naturally an important place. My feelings with regard to him were of a curiously mixed kind. From having lived so much alone—in *mental*, rather than physical, loneliness—I had acquired a habit of more minute self-examination than is usual with young people, and the question I found myself asking, now, was, Why, considering this very heart-loneliness, I had not been more affected by the interest which an at-

tractive and distinguished man had certainly evinced in me? Why, in a word—with all my yearning for the romantic, and my belief in a theory of predestination, and the intense *besoin d'aimer* which lay at my heart—had I not immediately succumbed to the charms of this handsome foreign Prince, and fallen “head over ears” in love with him upon the spot? I recognised, now that I was no longer fettered by the mysterious power which was the birthright of the Crecszoleskis, that I had felt for the Prince an interest which was entirely devoid of any tender sympathy. He had dominated me, in a measure, it is true, for the short time during which it had pleased him to exert his hereditary gift; but I had been fascinated without being touched. Nevertheless, as I thought about him now, I realised that he had at least ministered to my girlish vanity, and that I should certainly like to

see him just once more—by daylight—if only to ascertain whether I had formed a correct estimate of his personal appearance. The scrap of paper upon which Mr. Collingwood had written his name, was lying crumpled up on the dressing-table, by the side of my fan and lace pocket-handkerchief. I smoothed it out, and spelt over to myself the “totally unpronounceable name,” which, however, I flattered myself I had completely mastered now.

As I examined the paper by the morning light, I perceived that there was something written upon the other side of it, which Mr. Collingwood had probably not remarked, for the characters were extremely small, and written in faint bluish ink. A woman’s handwriting, evidently; and evidently, too, the writing of a woman who was not English. The words spoke for themselves:—
“And now, once more, *adieu, Excellence!*”

(they ran) "*à tout jamais, peut-être!* In remembrance of that which appears to have departed beyond all hope of recall, I must again entreat your good offices *auprès de mon cher frère Hugo*, who will probably not remain in England longer than a few weeks."

The Prince's sister, I gathered from these lines—the only other surviving member of this remarkable family—had been acquainted with Mr. Collingwood in the past, and her brother's visit to our neighbourhood had probably been due to this connecting link.

Breakfast was announced before I had proceeded much further with my reflections; and, on going downstairs, I found Miss Warden already in the dining-room.

As I had anticipated, she, too, was overflowing with impressions of the previous night. She was convinced, of course, that the foreign Prince had fallen in love with

me at first sight. Such things happened constantly; one read of them in books; besides which, it had all been foretold by the cards! She had been informed that he belonged to one of the oldest families in Poland; that, unlike some foreign Princes, he owned vast possessions; that he had occupied several distinguished appointments, and was unmarried. All this, too, had been distinctly foretold. Then Mr. Collingwood—what a delightful person! so clever, so well-informed, so fascinating! *He*, too, she felt convinced, was hopelessly smitten by my charms.

“Mr. Collingwood,” I protested, amused at her fatuity, “a man old enough to be my father!”

“People constantly marry husbands who are a good deal older than themselves,” returned Miss Warden, cheerfully. “Look at the case of your poor Mama. Mr. Col-

lingwood seems to be quite devoted to you ; and to me he seems like a young man."

"Well, at any rate it won't be possible for me to marry them both!" I said, laughing.

"There could be no reason—under ordinary circumstances—why anybody should be anxious for you to marry at all," replied my governess, assuming a more serious air.

"People are often very happy in a single state ; but your position, my dear, I can't help confessing, is, in some respects, unfortunate. It is *exceptional*, at any rate ; and it would be of the greatest importance to your future happiness if you could make an advantageous marriage whilst you are young. Sometimes—as in my own case—we are apt to defer this step until it is rather late!" and she looked down at her plate and sighed.

"I can assure you I am in no hurry to

marry," I exclaimed. "I am quite contented living on here as I am."

"It would be different if you could go on living here always," returned Miss Warden, gravely; "but supposing anything were to happen to your poor papa, who is now over sixty, and far from being in a satisfactory state of health? This place could be no longer your home. Mrs. Ingleby was going about last night speaking of you as 'the beautiful heiress,' and it is evident, my dear, that you will be exceedingly well off, for there are certain possessions—according to Mr. Collingwood, who seems to know all about you—which are bound to come to you immediately upon the death of Sir Harry; whilst Croft's Farm—that delightful little place where your poor mother used to live before she married—reverts to you as soon as you are twenty-one. Northover House, however, where you have lived all your life,

and the property which lies round about it, will pass away to your cousin, Colonel Courtenay Davenant."

"Yes, I know that," I answered; "though I didn't know that cousin Courtenay had become a Colonel."

"He is only a Colonel in the Guards, which, it seems, is equivalent to a Captain in any other regiment. He has got on capitally in his profession (I learnt all this from Mr. Collingwood), and has now been appointed military *attaché* somewhere—a very eligible post. He's very clever and good-looking, just ten years older than you are, and, if only you two could have married, there would have been a way out of the difficulty at once."

"Ah! So I am to be married to *him*, now! What shall I do with my other two admirers?"

"This marriage with your cousin, how-

ever," Miss Warden continued, without heeding me, "seems, now, very unlikely to take place."

She said no more, but sighed, and went on with her breakfast. Her remark excited my curiosity. She seemed, I thought, to have imbibed an immense amount of information in the course of a single night!

"Is my cousin going to be married to anybody else?" I inquired of her by-and-by.

"Not that I know of; Mr. Collingwood, at least, did not say so. But he saw your cousin not long ago, in London, before he had received this new appointment, and he said then, it seems, that he had quite given up all idea of what he alluded to as 'the family marriage project.' "

"By which he meant his possible marriage with me?"

"Yes; Mr. Collingwood may not have intended me to repeat all this, but I'm doing

so entirely for your own good. It appears that your cousin knows Mr. Collingwood well, and is, besides, a great friend of a young Collingwood, a nephew of your godfather's, who is in the same regiment with him, and who sometimes visits down here. Colonel Davenant, therefore, knew a good deal about your poor papa's odd ways, and of the dull life you lead at Northover. He asked a good many questions about you, but I fancy that Mr. Collingwood was the first to allude to the marriage project, from what he said, and then it was that Colonel Davenant told him he had entirely given up all notion of it, although, at one time, he had thought that it would have been advantageous both to himself and the property."

I felt piqued in spite of myself.

"He might have taken the trouble, first, to find out whether I should have agreed

to it!" I said with some warmth; "a person can hardly 'give up' a thing that has never been within their reach!"

"Well, my dear, if he had thought fit to propose to you, I should hope that you would not have been so foolish as to throw away so good a chance, for it would certainly have been one of the most satisfactory arrangements possible! Colonel Davenant, however, thinks differently. He has always objected, upon principle, to the union of first cousins, and was only led to contemplate this marriage because it had been a favourite scheme of his father's. Lately, however, he has become confirmed in his first opinion. He looks, now, upon the relationship as an insurmountable barrier."

"Why *now*, more than at first?"

"Because of things which have since occurred—unfortunate circumstances."

"Nothing that *I* can have done?" I inquired eagerly.

"No, no, dear; far from it! And it seems indeed hard that you should suffer for what isn't in the least your fault. Mr. Collingwood seemed very much concerned about it. He said it was utter nonsense to object to the cousinship. But the subject is such a painful one that I hardly like to allude to it."

"Ah, but you must tell me everything, now that you have said so much!" I exclaimed. "Mr. Collingwood shall never know that you repeated his words."

"Well, then, dearest Helen, disapproving as Colonel Davenant did, of such marriages in the abstract, he had gradually come to the conclusion that, in this particular case, one might have been possible, until it came to his knowledge that ——"

She hesitated, and began cutting her toast into an infinity of little pieces.

I felt impatient and apprehensive to an intense degree.

“Until *what* came to his knowledge?” I eagerly inquired.

“Until he discovered that there was a tendency to madness in the family. You have made me tell you everything now!”

“He considers that poor papa is mad?”

“He considers that he displays a tendency that way; and you know, dear, that he is not the only person who thinks this. You see now what I meant when I said that your position was rather unfortunate—not quite so brilliant as it seemed. Your cousin has been prevented, on this account, from making you an offer of marriage, even when it would be greatly to the advantage of the estate. Other people may, very likely, be prevented too. Poor Sir Harry is no kind of companion to you. He will never be able to introduce you into London society, or receive visitors here. His death,

it is true, would probably silence all these distressing rumours; but then you will have to turn out of your old home. Your cousin was very determined in his opinion, it seems; nothing Mr. Collingwood said could shake him."

I remained silent for some time. It did not surprise me much to hear that Sir Harry should be considered mad. Exaggerated accounts of his strange behaviour had probably reached my cousin Courtenay's ears, and I could not blame him for being influenced by them. It was not as though he had abandoned the idea of our marriage on account of anything he might have heard to my own disadvantage. I felt how utterly absurd it was of me to be affected in the least by what I had just learnt of Colonel Davenant's objections, considering that, as far as I could recollect, I had only seen him once in my life, and that was

when I was little more than a baby. I was not quite ignorant of the fact that there had been some talk—chiefly amongst the servants and gossiping neighbours—of our eventual marriage; but I regarded this as merely a result of its becoming known, amongst meddlesome people, that I possessed a male cousin of a suitable age,—a marriage with whom might be to the advantage of the Northover estates.

I am bound to confess, however (desiring as I do to give in this narrative a description of my real feelings—however wrong or unreasonable they may have been), that the impression conveyed to me by Miss Warden's well-meant words was, that I had received some manner of unmerited slight at the hands of my absent and unknown kinsman. He seemed to have given up the idea of this marriage (I thought) without a single feeling of regret or compunction!

It had never occurred to him, evidently, that I might be in any way loveable or attractive as a woman ! I had been looked upon merely as a necessary element in "the family marriage project," which was to be pursued, or abandoned, just as it might seem good to him !

Without falling in with Miss Warden's ridiculous notions as to the effect which she imagined that I had produced—not only upon Mr. Collingwood (my own godfather !) but also upon the Polish Prince who had beheld me last night for the first time—I certainly felt, at this moment, an intense desire to convince my cousin Courtenay, after some very decided fashion, that I could bear, with perfect equanimity, the idea of an existence without him ; and that this voluntary abandonment of me, upon his part, would not necessarily condemn me to a life of celibacy !

CHAPTER VII.

ALL night long I could not sleep for thinking of what Miss Warden had told me.

With regard to my father, I could not bring myself to believe that he was really mad. My mother's sudden death had given his nervous system a violent shock. He had withdrawn himself entirely from all genial companionship, neglected his appearance, and shut himself up like a hermit. Then, with the laudable desire, probably, of returning once more to the duties and responsibilities of his former life—or else from a wish to drown his absorb-

ing melancholy—he had had recourse to stimulants, the curse of so many unhappy low-spirited people, which, far from producing the desired effect, had reduced him to a condition which was even more deplorable than his previous state of despondency. “Poor Sir Harry” was a misanthrope—a drunkard—an irritable, miserable, unreasonable being—but surely not one that anybody could truthfully describe as actually insane?

After I had turned this subject well over in my mind, I began living, in imagination, the melancholy, monotonous, kind of existence which would probably be reserved for me if, as might be expected in the course of nature, I should survive my unfortunate father. I saw myself—no longer, possibly, in the first flush of youth—packing up all the little belongings that I could legitimately lay claim to as my own, and turning

my back for ever upon my old home—the house which my dear mother had graced with her beauty and enlivened by her smiles—wherein she had closed her eyes in death, and wherein my own had first opened to the light ! I saw myself bidding a sad farewell to the garden, the old summer-house, all my favourite nooks and corners, and then driving off, with my baggage, to Croft's Farm—the little place which, in right of my mother, who had inherited it at the death of my uncle Everard, would accrue to me in spite of my sex. Everything, of course, would seem very new, and strange, and cramped, just at first, after having lived in such a much bigger house. In time, however, I should probably get used to the change. I could go on with my music and drawing—this would cheer me in my loneliness—and do some good amongst the poor. I should

be able, I supposed, to afford a few horses, so that I could go for my usual rides. How odd it would seem, just at first, to pass by the Northover lodge-gates, without turning in at any of them! Miss Warden, if she had not been carried off by the wealthy and handsome husband who was so continually shadowed forth by the cards, might come and stay with me from time to time; or I might even be able to make some arrangement by which she should live with me altogether. If not, I could get a nice fluffy Persian cat, that I could grow fond of, or a dear, great, black, curly-backed retriever dog, with faithful brown eyes, and a tail that would begin wagging whenever he saw me coming! It would be better to have only a dog or a cat to care for than nothing at all!

So I mused on, "piling up the agony," until the tears begotten of a "sweet

self-pity" fell fast and thick upon my pillow.

Never, until this moment, had I so thoroughly realised what my future was likely to be! What a desolate, contracted, loveless kind of existence—scarcely, indeed, to be dignified by the name of an existence at all! An involuntary state of compulsory vegetation, which would go on until my time came to be cut down by the scythe of the grim reaper! What congenial spirit would ever take the trouble to seek me, once I was thus hidden and buried away from the civilised world? What fairy Prince would be likely to draw in his bridle-rein at the door of my humble and obscure abode? And all this while, up at North-over House—my dear, dear, lost home!—my cousin Courtenay would be lording it to his heart's content—married, of course, by that time, to the peerless lady of his choice,

the perfect pearl, selected, after all due consideration, as worthy of so great an honour, whose family escutcheon and "bill of health" must be alike free from speck or blemish; and who would sometimes pay me patronising visits, perhaps, and invite me to go over to afternoon tea!

When I arose, next morning, I looked pale and dispirited. I felt as though, in a single night, I had acquired the wisdom of years, by the light of which I seemed to perceive that my cousin Courtenay was a kind of enemy, to be both feared and mistrusted.

At the breakfast-table these morbid feelings underwent a good deal of modification. Here I found Miss Warden, in a most pleasurable state of excitement. She had just received a letter of the greatest importance, in her opinion, to me. It was from Mr. Collingwood, and ran as follows:—

“ DEAR MISS WARDEN,

“ My guest, Prince Crecszoleski, seems to have a mania for looking at country-houses, as he says he is thinking of settling amongst us some day, and so, if quite convenient to yourself and the fair Helen, he proposes to walk over and pay you his respects to-morrow, at about two o'clock, when it will interest him much to be shown the house and the pictures.

“ I shall not, I fear, be able to do myself the pleasure of accompanying him, as I think I shall be obliged to go up to London upon important business at the F. O., but I will see that he is started off on the right road.

“ Don't prepare luncheon for him, as he eats next to nothing. A cup of coffee, or green tea, is all that he will require. Of course, should you happen to be from home, or particularly engaged, he can go back by

the way he came, as it is not customary, as you are aware, for young ladies to receive such visitors *en tête-à-tête*. With kindest remembrances to Miss Helen,

“ I am, dear Miss Warden,

“ Yours very truly,

“ GEORGE COLLINGWOOD.

“ P.S.—Give Crecszoleski *lemon* with his tea instead of cream; and, if you want to make him feel quite happy, let him smoke as many cigarettes as he pleases.”

The “to-morrow” of Mr. Collingwood’s letter was now “to-day,” and Miss Warden was already in a flutter of anticipation.

“ You see, Helen,” she said, as I returned the letter to her after reading it, “ the plot is thickening fast! This mania for looking at country-houses is merely a pretext! The Prince wishes to see you again, to obtain a footing in your home. I wish that Mr.

Collingwood could have come too. We should have been four, then — a nicer number than three for private conversation in public, for I feel sure that the Prince has something particular to say to you. Don't you detect a ring of jealousy in Mr. Collingwood's letter—in his great anxiety, for instance, that you should not receive his friend *en tête-à-tête*?"

"I fancy he only wishes us to do what is considered the proper thing," I answered. "Princes are very likely more particular than other people, and Mr. Collingwood mayn't think we see enough of the world to know much of its ways. He tells you this just as he tells you to give the Prince lemon with his tea."

"I think quite differently, dear," returned Miss Warden looking extremely wise. "I think they are both very much smitten with you. Mr. Collingwood has

had to go up to London to-day upon important business at the Foreign Office. The Prince, aware of this, has fixed upon to-day for his visit. Mr. Collingwood, feeling that the Prince is his guest, and that he will be obliged to leave him alone for the whole day (for I hear that Lord Silchester seldom now quits his own apartment), cannot naturally object, however much he might have wished to accompany the Prince. As he is unable to do so, he fires off this letter to me, in order to make sure that his guest shall not see you alone ! That is how *I* read between the lines !”

I asked her why, if Mr. Collingwood entertained for me any such sentiments as she had imputed to him, he should have endeavoured to persuade my cousin Courtenay to adhere to the project of our marriage ?

“You told me yesterday,” I said, “that

Mr. Collingwood declared that it was utter nonsense to object to the cousinship, and that he had tried to shake Courtenay's scruples but could not succeed."

"Ah, well! that certainly does seem a little inconsistent," she answered thoughtfully; "but then we must remember, dear, that Mr. Collingwood is a diplomatist! Diplomats are never open or above-board in anything! Their trade is to conceal their real intentions. He may have wished to convince me, before he put forward his own views, that all possibility of your marriage with Colonel Davenant was at an end, in order that he might not appear to interfere with it. All the same, the Prince is evidently coming to see *you*, so that I certainly do not feel disposed to watch you both like a detective!"

As we now knew that Prince Crecszoleski never partook of luncheon, Miss Warden

thought that it might be as well, perhaps, that we, too, should not seem to be too carnivorous, and that he should not find us, as she expressed it, "sitting like two ogres all surrounded by bones."

We had the remains of our luncheon, therefore, cleared away a little earlier than usual, and betook ourselves to the old summer-house in the garden, the day being beautifully fine, where we ordered that both tea and coffee should be brought out to us as soon as our visitor arrived.

Afterwards, should he prefer it, we could adjourn to the house, but Miss Warden, who persisted in believing that the Prince would desire to talk with me confidentially, and who yet did not intend altogether to disregard the hint conveyed in Mr. Collingwood's letter, thought that he would be able to speak to me more freely in the garden than within doors. She could remain at

work in the summer-house, she said, whilst we two wandered about at our will—*only*, I was to imagine that her eyes were upon me all the time! In this way everybody would have reason to be satisfied.

I have alluded to this old summer-house before as one of my favourite resorts. My poor mother, too, as I had been told, was very fond of sitting in it, and this lent it an additional charm in my eyes.

The flower-garden, at Northover, was disposed in front of the principal windows after rather a formal fashion, upon a broad terrace, divided from the deer-park by a balustrade surmounted by urns and statues, beyond which the land dropped considerably. Level with this terrace, upon the higher ground, shady paths branched forth from each end of the garden, bordered upon the one side by high yew hedges, neatly clipped, and upon the other by the low

stone balustrade overlooking the outer park.

Only a short distance down the path which led from the right, and parallel with the yew hedge, was situated the old summer-house, so-called because another, a newer one, had been built at a more recent date, in the corresponding pathway to the left.

I much preferred the "old" summer-house of the two. It was deeper, more sequestered, and the view which lay extended in front of it, as one looked out through its rustic columns over the grey terrace-wall, was calm and beautiful in the extreme.

A broad extent of undulating park-land, well wooded with noble forest trees, and feathery with bracken, amongst which the fallow-deer would lie herded together in the hot summer days out of the way of the flies,

with nothing of them visible save their branching antlers. To the left the ground became more broken and hilly, and a murmuring stream, shining out here and there from between bulrush and willow-weed, went wandering down the valley like a silver serpent. Beyond all this, upon very clear days, the blue line of the sea could be plainly discerned, kissing the sky, as it were, at the uttermost edge of the visible horizon.

Miss Warden and I had not been long established in this delightful retreat before a footman brought us out Prince Crecszoleski's card, and, looking across the lawn, we saw him coming towards us from the drawing-room, the windows of which opened upon the terrace.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER partaking of coffee, which, in spite of all our forethought with regard to the lemon, Prince Crecszoleski preferred to green tea,—admiring the view, and conversing upon general topics,—Miss Warden asked me whether I should not like to show the Prince over the rest of the garden before we repaired to the house. She appeared to be intent upon some complication in her knitting, and displayed no sign of following us when we rose to act upon her suggestion.

“That good lady—your duenna—under-

stands me exactly!" remarked the Prince, as soon as we were out of ear-shot. "She perceives that my visit was not to *her* but to *you*!"

I made no reply, not knowing, quite, what I ought to say, and we sauntered on past the house, and so down into the shady pathway to the left.

"So this is where you live!" he exclaimed, seeking my eyes, as though with melancholy interest. "This is the peaceful, beautiful, English home, where you have passed sixteen?—seventeen? How many years shall I say?"

"I am past nineteen," I answered, thinking that he wished, for some reason, to discover my age, and being too young, as yet, to wish to conceal it.

"Ah, but you look much younger," he remarked. "In no country do people look so young as here in England. What age

would you give *me*, now, if you were obliged to guess?"

I looked up at his face, determined to say just what I thought.

He appeared no older by daylight than he did in the evening. I remarked the same lines in his face, the absence of all ruddy flesh tints, the dark shadows under his strange eyes, the serious, rather weary expression, with a curious gleam, now and again, as of the awakening of some more ardent instinct. His figure—tall, lithe, and distinguished-looking—seemed to be younger than his face.

"Thirty-six?" I hazarded, still contemplating his singular countenance with attention.

"Not yet thirty-four," he answered. "You see, you have aged me by more than two years! But then I have not lived always, like you, this peaceful home-life.

Tell me"—he added, suddenly—"does this existence of perpetual repose entirely satisfy the cravings of your nature? You are intelligent — observant — sympathetic. I can imagine that to those who have already battled, and suffered, in the outer world, this place must seem, as it seems to me at this moment, like a terrestrial paradise; but, previous to having had any such experiences? Do you feel no desire, sometimes, to do like this—to plunge out into what may be beyond?"

He placed his right hand lightly upon the flat coping-stone at the top of the balustrade as he spoke, and vaulted over it into the outer park. On account of the fall in the ground I was now some distance above him.

"Ah! you won't find it so easy to vault back again, Prince!" I said, looking down at him as I rested my elbows upon the stone

parapet. "Perhaps I might find it the same if I quitted my quiet home."

"With your help," he answered, holding out his hand to me.

I took it, instinctively, fancying that he was about to vault back again and required my assistance. He walked on, however, still holding my hand, until we reached the spot where the stone balustrade was replaced by an iron railing. This he leapt over easily, and we strolled on together walking side by side as before.

Whilst the Prince was holding my hand, I had again experienced the curious sensation, as of subjection to a superior will, which had oppressed me in the tea-room at Ingleby Grange. I felt it, however, in a less marked degree, and upon his relinquishing his hold it left me altogether.

We were quite close now to the summer-house corresponding to the one in which we

had left Miss Warden. The prince proposed that we should sit down and talk a little before rejoining my "duenna," as he called her.

"You are looking pale to-day, Miss Davenant," he said, looking at me earnestly; "probably you are still suffering from the fatigues of the ball?"

"Oh, no! the ball didn't tire me in the least! But last night I could not sleep. My thoughts were too disagreeable."

"You sleep well, generally?" he inquired.

"Yes," I answered. "How could we live without sleep?"

"I am endeavouring to live without it now," he answered. "I am purposely trying, for the moment, to conquer my material impulses, in order to pursue some psychical experiments in which I am interested. Tell me," he added, and he gazed still more intently at my face, "my friend

George—my amiable host—is he in any way related to you ? ”

“ No,” I answered, “ he is no relation—only a very old family friend. Why do you ask ? ”

“ You may not feel complimented, perhaps—in spite of his being so great a favourite with your sex—but the fact is, to a foreigner, as I am, English faces that are of the same type and complexion seem often to bear a kind of family likeness to one another, even when there is no cause for it. My friend George, in spite of his cosmopolitan experiences, will always be recognized wherever he goes as an Englishman; and you, too, Miss Helen, with your tall figure, your air *de Diane Chasseresse*, you could be nothing else but a daughter of “*la perfide Albion* ;” and thus, just when you held up your head, so, and looked at me, I fancied that I perceived some kind of

resemblance between you, which, joined to the great interest he seems to evince in you, made me think he might be a relation."

"No," I answered, "I have very few male relations living. Only my father and one cousin. It was a thousand pities that I was not a boy myself!"

I sighed, thinking of my possible future at Croft's Farm, the Persian cat, the curly-backed retriever, and all the other consolations of desolate spinsterhood.

"If you had been a boy," returned the Prince, smiling—but rather sadly, I thought—"I should not be sitting here with you to-day!"

I was perfectly at my ease with him now, and felt, somehow, as if I had known him for a long time. His society, however, depressed me unaccountably. I felt that he was unhappy, restless, disappointed with his experience of life. I might have desired,

perhaps,—being young and romantic,—to bring back his happiness, his peace of mind, his shattered illusions, but I was penetrated as with a sense of my inability to serve him adequately.

He attracted and repelled me in so strange a manner that I longed to discover some clue to the mystery.

By-and-by, seeing that I was about to return to the garden-terrace, he said earnestly—

“Miss Helen, just one question before we separate. I have asked you so many already, that I fear I must seem impertinent; but time presses, and obliges me to dispense with ceremony. Have you decided yet, in any definite manner, upon the course of your future life? Have your affections become engaged? Are you betrothed to anybody?”

“No,” I answered. “I have no future

planned out ; I do not care about anybody ; and I am not engaged to be married."

"Quite, quite, free ?" he asked, looking at me very earnestly. "Not even a wandering dream in your mind, or in your heart ?"

"Nothing !" I replied, speaking sadly. "I have, of course, my hopes and my fears, and I build my castles in the air ; but that is all ! And you ?"

"Nothing, nothing !" he answered. "Marriage, affection, have not hitherto entered into the programme of my existence. Till now, all women have seemed to me like dolls !"

I did not answer him. Somehow I had expected this speech. I seemed to know that it must come before long.

"And when you hope, and fear, and build your castles, you sit here, where we are now sitting, looking like this, out over the woods and fields ?"

"Yes; but always in the other summer-house, where we left my governess. I like it better than this one."

"Ah! And is not that the way I came this afternoon?"

He pointed to the road, which wound down through the park, towards that part of the estate which joined Lord Silchester's property.

"Yes, that's the way you must have come. It will be your shortest way back, too. You could walk it in less than half-an-hour."

"And may I not walk it again before I leave this place, very probably for ever? Some warm evening, perhaps, when my friend George is sitting, after dinner, with his old father? If I were then to wander out and find myself here, and then to leap over that wall, as I did just now, would you be sitting in your arbour, building your castles,

and should I see you alone, where we could converse without interruption ? ”

I felt no thrill of emotion as the Prince uttered these words. I perceived what was unusual, romantic, sensational, in the situation, but I was mistress of myself in every fibre as I answered—

“ Why should you come to me then, when you could come by daylight ? What would anybody think who saw you coming as if by stealth ? ”

“ They would not see me—nobody but you ; or, if they did, they would think merely that I had dined here, and was sitting with you, after dinner, in your garden. To-day is Wednesday. I came but for one week, and am leaving for London on Monday morning. Tell me that on Friday evening, at a little before ten o'clock, you will be there—where we left your duenna ? ”

"No, no, no!" I exclaimed, rising. "What can have made you think that I would do this? Do not come, I implore you! I shall not be there!"

"You will be there," he said quietly, meeting my eyes, for one moment, with a look which seemed half a supplication and half a command. "You will know that with me you will be as safe as with your father or your cousin, and you will come!"

When I returned to Miss Warden I felt weary and exhausted, as though with some kind of moral conflict. I had been victorious for the moment, but I had lost strength in the encounter. I was agitated and disturbed, too, at the thought that the Prince might persist in his intention.

As we entered the old summer-house, I saw that he seemed to be taking particular note of the locality.

Close to where Miss Warden was sitting

at work, a word was picked out, upon the ground, in white pebbles.

It was "*Venture*," the name of a favourite dog belonging once to my mother—a water-spaniel, I had been told—which had been given to her by Mr. Collingwood, and so called because of its daring and intrepid disposition.

It had died but a short time before its mistress, and had been buried here. I explained this to Prince Crecszoleski before we repaired to the house.

"*Venture!*" he repeated, looking into my eyes again, with the same expression of commanding supplication that I had observed in them before.

Miss Warden fancied, no doubt, that he merely wanted to arrive at the correct pronunciation of the dead spaniel's name, but I felt sure that he was alluding to his project for Friday night.

CHAPTER IX.

I NEED hardly say that Prince Crecszoleski's distinguished manners and appearance had made a most favourable impression upon Miss Warden.

We were all made of the same clay, of course (she remarked), and Princes were mortal, like everybody else, and we were told in Scripture that we were not to put our trust in them; but still, she had observed, over and over again, whenever she had found herself in the society of really great personages, that there was something different about them, and, cer-

tainly, altogether superior. It was easy to see that our visitor, for instance, was utterly unlike anybody else.

I suggested that perhaps this may have proceeded from the fact that he was a Pole. She maintained, on the contrary, that it was solely because he was a Prince. Only one circumstance seemed to have disturbed and perplexed her a little. Whilst she was showing the Prince over the picture-gallery, previous to his departure (when, wishing my reply to his suggestion to be taken as final, I had not accompanied her), it had transpired, in the course of conversation, that Mr. Collingwood had not, after all, gone up to his appointment at the Foreign Office. His guest, indeed, was not aware that he had had any such intention. He had walked with him the greater part of the way to Northover, in order that he might not go wrong, and then,—he had

simply turned back, and gone home again !

Here, according to Miss Warden, was a great mystery, and a total upsetting of all her previous theories. Why had Mr. Collingwood pretended that he was going up to London when he had had no intention of the kind ? Why had he not accompanied the Prince upon his visit, particularly when he had seemed to be so anxious that I should not receive him alone ? All this was most incomprehensible !

“ Perhaps,” I said, amused at her readiness to attach importance to trifles, “ Mr. Collingwood may be the man of double character ! ”

Considering the manner in which I had been educated—my hankering after excitement and romance—my craving for sympathy—my longing to make the entire happiness of some one other human being,

and, by so doing, to ensure my own—my frame of mind, at this critical time, was almost a surprise to myself. I was beset by none of those rash impulses which are so often the dangerous accompaniments of youth. My most disturbing thoughts, just at first, were occasioned by the idea that the Prince should be at the trouble of walking all this way, immediately after his dinner, for nothing. I felt that he would probably adhere to his intention at all hazards, and I realised that, in spite of myself, I should be certain to feel very restless, and responsible, once I knew that he was waiting for me, close by, in the old summer-house. I should be sitting comfortably in the drawing-room, meanwhile (I thought), seeming to be placidly reading my book, or demurely working at my embroidery, whilst the clock went ticking on and on, past the appointed hour. The

centre window, as was usual upon summer evenings, would have been left wide open, and to step out into the garden, and walk as far as the terrace, would be but the affair of a few moments. Often and often, upon warm nights, I had done this before! Miss Warden, who rarely went out of doors after dinner, would see nothing odd in this proceeding. It might seem rather cruel to the Prince, no doubt, not to come out, and say a few kind words to him, when I could manage it so easily, but I had said decidedly that I would not be there, and I would adhere to my word! . . .

If he had only said to me, "I love you; come to me, because I cannot bear to leave you without a tender word of farewell!" I might, perhaps, have decided differently, seeing that it would have seemed so good to be loved! But, although from his manner, I had certainly been led to suppose

that I had aroused in him sentiments of interest or curiosity, he had said nothing to me of this kind. It was too soon, perhaps, for him to make me a declaration of affection; but then, surely, it was too soon, also, for me to agree to an assignation with him in the garden!

No! He had asked me to meet him (I said to myself) merely to test the strength of his mesmeric powers—to try some sort of cold-blooded experiment upon me! “You will know that with me you will be as safe as with your father or with your cousin,” he had said. This was to show me that there would be no question of anything tender or sentimental. “I will prove to her that I possess a power over her” (he had probably said to himself). “She shall see that I can compel her to come to me, at any hour, and at any place I may appoint.” His *heart* had had nothing whatever to

do with his proposal. It was merely a question of *will*, and I was certainly not going to commit an indiscreet act merely for the privilege of being mesmerised, or biologised, or subjected to some manner of mental vivisection !

This is as correct a description as I am able to give, now, of the state of my feelings during the greater part of the night which followed upon the Prince's visit.

Towards morning, however, I fell into a troubled sleep, and dreamed a vague, incoherent, miserable kind of dream. I fancied that the Prince was, for some reason, in terrible agitation and distress of mind. At first we seemed to be in a large, empty, rambling sort of house, larger than any house I had ever beheld—cold, damp, and deserted-looking, with carpetless floors, and walls which, between the folds of some faded tapestry, displayed the

rough-hewn divisions in the masonry. I felt the cold and dreariness of the place chill me to the very marrow of my bones. The Prince was wandering from room to room, seeking for me, and calling me by my name; but, although I could see him perfectly from the place where I stood, I felt paralysed, and found it impossible to respond to his call. Then the whole scene changed, but the Prince was still there—this time nearly up to his neck in black turbid water, which, as it dripped from his hands, seemed to take the colour of blood. On his face was a look of horror and supplication. I was standing upon some stone steps, a little way above him, and he kept on holding out his hands to me as if entreating me to come to his rescue; but again I seemed to be utterly incapable of moving hand or foot in his service.

When I awoke I felt prostrated, both in

mind and body. I was conscious, for the first time, that I possessed a nervous system, and that it seemed to be shattered. My feelings towards Prince Crecszoleski had undergone a decided change. I felt no longer so anxious to oppose his will. My dream appeared to have made me much more intimate with him, and I seemed to understand that, from some inexplicable cause, he was in bitter need of my help. A feeling of intense compassion invaded my whole being. It did not make me fancy that I was in love with him exactly, but it drove from my heart the notion that he was an alien and a stranger—to be mistrusted, perhaps, and feared a little as well. I felt more, now, as if I stood in some kind of responsible position with regard to a persecuted and defenceless being, whose sufferings *I* alone should be enabled to soothe.

I think that, at this period of my life, in spite of an unquestioning faith which rendered me perfectly at rest upon the subject of Orthodox Belief, I was, perhaps, superstitious rather than religious, attaching a great deal of secret importance to signs and omens, and never doubting but that, in any special emergency, there would be some sort of providential interposition upon my behalf, if only I could be inspired to read the message aright.

Seeing, therefore, that I had become so weakened in my endeavour to oppose what seemed, now, more like the working out of a predestined plan than the mere caprice of an individual ;—seeing, also, that it was Thursday morning, and that, if I meant to acquaint the Prince with any change in my decision, I ought to get my letter ready by half-past seven that very evening, in order that he might receive it by the first post

on Friday;—I made up my mind that I would be guided entirely by what the day brought forth in the way of inclining or opposing influences. That I would carefully observe and analyse—that is to say, every circumstance, however trivial—which might occur between the early morning and the evening post, and be guided, in my subsequent conduct, by the direction in which these circumstances should seem to tend, independently of all personal inclination or objection.

I had scarcely arrived at this resolution when a letter was put into my hand.

“Ah! thank heaven!” I said to myself, after I had read its contents. “All has been decided for me. I need struggle and do battle no more!”

The letter consisted of a few lines from old Matthews, the butler, who had gone with my father to London some weeks ago.

Sir Harry had not been very well ; his doctor advised a change, and he was returning to Northover that very afternoon by the three-twenty express from town. Would I send the brougham to the station to meet him ?

This intelligence, to my mind, entirely disposed of the Prince's romantic visit, and I must confess that I experienced a sense of intense relief in consequence.

My father's habit of wandering about at odd hours, his dislike and mistrust of strangers, would make it impossible for me to accede, now, to the Prince's request even if I had felt inclined to do so. With Sir Harry, too, would arrive by this same three-twenty express, one " Nero "—to wit, a formidable-looking dun mastiff, ferocious as his imperial namesake of old time—whose particular vocation was to prowl about the garden in the evening, with the object of

alarming trespassers. The Prince could not think me heartless, or insensible, for not wishing him to be mauled by this terrible animal! My spirits rose with the consciousness that my responsibility in the matter had ended.

Miss Warden, to whom master and dog were alike alarming, seemed not a little surprised at the satisfaction I displayed at the news of their return. Notwithstanding her tried affection, however, I dared not confide to her my reasons, fearing lest she should endeavour, perhaps, to influence me, when I desired that Fate, and Fate alone, should be my guide.

As I was sitting towards mid-day in the old summer-house, which in spite of myself I could not help regarding now with sentiments of romantic interest, a servant came out to me with a telegram from my father's London physician. It ran thus:—

“Sir Harry seriously unwell. Unable to

travel. At his request have telegraphed to Colonel Davenant. Will write."

Revulsion of feeling! Over-setting of previous determination! Doubt, uncertainty, vacillation, to be my portion once more! . . .

Miss Warden, who had followed the footman in order to ascertain what the telegram was about, was evidently relieved at learning its purport.

I silently realised that, if I intended still to be guided by circumstances, the Prince had certainly scored a point.

But no! "Stay, James!" I called out to the retreating footman. "Ask the messenger to wait; I shall have an answer to send back! 'Seriously unwell!'" I repeated, turning to Miss Warden, "'Telegraphed to Colonel Davenant'?" How much that was ominous might lurk in these few words? My poor unhappy father!—(I thought, the tears coming into my eyes)—

irritable, unreasonable, utterly wanting in all dignity and self-control ; but still much more his own enemy than he was anybody else's ; and, over and above everything, in spite of all his shortcomings, still my only remaining parent ! What if I should never behold him again ? Had I been dutiful and affectionate enough to him ? I asked myself, reproachfully. As his daughter—the only child of the woman he had once so tenderly loved—ought I not to have penetrated, by force, the reserve which I had allowed to grow up between us, and conquered, by the sheer strength of my devotion, a way to his suffering heart ?

I would go to him now, at any rate ; on this I was determined ! I would telegraph to this effect immediately, await a reply, and then start off to London by an afternoon train !

I informed Miss Warden of my decision,

and that I should take Mason with me, who would be able to make herself useful as a nurse, after which I wrote and despatched my message.

The voice of Prince Crecszolcski, calling out to me through the echoing rooms of the deserted mansion of my dream, seemed to grow fainter and fainter, the dark blood-stained waters to rise, higher and higher, round his struggling form ! For one moment, a sense as of his bitter need of me, oppressed me to such an extent that I was upon the point of recalling my message. Then I experienced a feeling of relief, of thankfulness, and of soothed and satisfied conscience.

I went upstairs to my room and informed Mason of my determination to go to London. She heartily approved of it, and commenced getting together the wearing apparel that I should require during my stay.

At about half-past two came my father's

reply to my telegram. I tore open the brown envelope with trembling fingers and read these words :—

“Do not require you. Unnecessary to come. You will only be in the way.”

The luminous sea-green eyes seemed to smile now ; the finely-cut lips to curl scornfully, whilst the soft low voice murmured :

“You thought to escape me ! But no ! I said that you would do as I desired, and you will be there !”

I was deeply wounded at my father's message. All the dormant yearnings of affection which, awakened by apprehensions as to his possible danger, had fluttered forth from my heart upon eager wings, seemed to have been driven back crushed and humiliated.

He “did not require” me ; it was “unnecessary” for me to go, for I should “only be in the way !”

The advantage, if such it could be called, was now upon the side of the Prince; but I was averse to letting matters rest thus. I would go and seek for some fuller revelation. My father had failed me in the hour of my need. I would go and ask counsel of my mother, kneeling by her quiet grave in the green churchyard, and accept as final the impressions which came to me at that hallowed spot.

CHAPTER X.

I WENT, forthwith, into the garden, and gathered a bunch of the sweetest flowers I could find; and then, passing through a gate which led across the deer-park, I came to the little Norman church, near to which my mother was sleeping.

She had not been laid in the family vault of the Davenants, amongst my father's departed kinsfolk, and I did not regret this now, since I should not have been able to go and commune with her in that gloomy place. Her grave was green and daisy-starred, as I should wish my own to be, if

I could have the choosing of it, in a remote corner of the old church-yard, some way from all the more important monuments. Probably she may have expressed a desire to be buried in this quiet spot. No stone, or record, of any kind, had been set above her, and I should never have recognised her grave if I had not had it pointed out to me, long ago, by some of the old servants. Two stakes of hazel rose at the head and foot of the grassy mound, to mark out the space which was not to be encroached upon by the newer dead ; but, beyond this, there was neither name nor sign to tell who was "the dreamer that now slept." Some day, no doubt, Sir Harry intended to erect a fitting monument to the memory of the wife he had loved so well ; but he was not, now, in a mood favourable to the carrying out of projects, and probably nobody liked to remind him of so painful a subject.

There were no more graves beyond my mother's, her narrow bed being upon the extreme edge of one portion of the burying-ground, only shut off from a sweet unconsecrated hayfield — which a little while before had been waving with meadow flowers and fluttering with butterflies—by a low hawthorn hedge and a grey wooden paling.

It was to this side of her grave that I betook me now. I placed my tribute of flowers upon the grassy mound, and then, covering my eyes with my hands, I knelt down and strove to commune with, and appeal to, the gentle spirit that had departed for ever from the earth. I possess the power of summoning up before me the faces of those who are dead, or absent, till I can see them as plainly as I can see my own face in a mirror. My mother's image had not faded in the least from my memory,

and I could recall it quite distinctly, as I had seen her for the last time, in her white night-dress, with her dark hanging hair and her sweet girlish face looking anxious and startled.

As I knelt thus by the side of her grave, transported, in imagination, to the days of my childhood, and utterly oblivious, for the moment, to my actual surroundings, a sudden impression, uninvited by either previous suspicion or conjecture, took possession of my mind. An inward voice seemed to inquire of me, now, for the first time, whether I could make sure, after all, that my father had been so devotedly attached to my mother? Whether, on the contrary, his behaviour since her death was not more like what might have been occasioned by the prickings of a tardily awakened remorse, or by some inexplicable feeling of vindictive resentment, than by

the grief which must follow upon the loss of an earthly treasure ?

Why had my father treated me with such coldness and neglect ever since he had been left a widower ? Why did everything connected in any way with my mother's memory, her friends, her room, her portraits, become suddenly so unendurable to him ? And why was she resting, now, in this obscure and nameless grave, with nothing to distinguish it from those of the peasant-folk—elbowing her hard by—save those two hazel-stakes, set there as though in anticipation that a vampire might rise from that cold and inanimate breast ? The most generous manner of criticising the actions of another is, surely, by endeavouring—with all due allowance for exceptional circumstance or individual impulse—to put one's self in that other one's place ; and I began to speculate, now, as to how I should

have behaved had I found myself in the position of a widower with one child, who had been devotedly attached to his departed wife.

It occurred to me that, had I been Sir Harry Davenant, a rich man, with all the resources of Art at my disposal, and had I found myself thus bereaved, in the afternoon of life, when I had no inclination to form new ties, I should, probably, as soon as the first agony of my grief had subsided, have set about raising some beautiful tomb or mausoleum, wherein all that remained of my beloved might be worthily enshrined. I felt convinced that no project would be of greater interest to me than the planning and devising of this memorial, and that one of the most satisfying of my remaining consolations would be derived from watching its gradual progress towards completion. Then, before this, or after it, according to my taste

and temperament, I should have the health and education of my child to superintend—the child that was *her* child as well as my own—reproducing (most likely) in form, feature, or voice, something of the beloved being who had gone from me for ever; and then, too, I might strive to aid and comfort any poor desolate people who came in my way, and who were afflicted as I was.

Looked at from this point of view, my father's conduct appeared to me to have been both unfeeling and inconsistent—as regarded his wife's memory, his wife's child, his wife's final resting-place. As I glanced towards the humble graves that lay around me, I saw that there was scarcely one of them, of recent date, upon which some care in the form of growing flowers, or gathered nosegay, had not been lavished. A tufted cypress intervened between my mother's grave and that of the nearest of her rustic

neighbours, a village carpenter, as I learnt from the inscription upon the wooden head-piece ;—a crockery mug, full of double daisies and wall-flowers, bedecked his grassy bed, and told of the ministration of tender hands ; but upon *her* grave no sign or symbol of affection from the husband who had been supposed to love her so well in life ! When I and my flowers had faded and passed away, who would ever turn aside to drop a tear upon this nameless and forsaken spot ?

As I meditated thus, I was startled at hearing the sound of a long-drawn sigh, proceeding from close to where I was kneeling ; and, peeping between the branches of the tufted cypress, I perceived the figure of a woman, crouched down at the further side of the poor carpenter's grave. She had covered her face with her hands, and seemed to be silently weeping. When she removed them

I saw that she was a hard-featured daughter of toil—looking like a harvester, or farm-servant—neither young nor comely, but with a faithful, earnest face, idealised now by the refining influence of sorrow.

I rose from my knees, so that she might know that she was not alone. It was evident that she had arrived after me at the churchyard, and had not perceived me till now. She seemed to be confused at my presence.

“Good afternoon,” I said, thinking to put her more at her ease.

“Good afternoon, miss,” she repeated, wiping her eyes with her coarse linen apron. “You’ve got somebody lying here, too?” she inquired of me by-and-by.

“Yes, my mother;” and I pointed to the nameless grave. “She is next to—your husband, perhaps?” . . .

“No, miss,” she answered sadly, “we

didn't never go to church together—me and him,—but was just as fond and true as if we had. But one day he asked me to do something that I said I would see him lying here dead before I'd agree to, and we didn't part friendly. And, next day, I heard that he'd fallen off a ladder and was taken to his account; and so I couldn't never make it up with him again. And now, miss, that he's dead and gone, there isn't any mortal thing that I wouldn't be ready to do for him if he was to ask me; and so, whenever I can find time to run over from my situation, I come here and tell him this, and it seems to make me feel much easier; and though he can't ever ask me for anything no more, it makes me fancy that he knows just how it all happened! It's a long while ago now, miss; but it seems all quite fresh in my mind!"

We passed out of the churchyard together,

and along the short bit of highway road which lay between us and the park. Her simple ungrammatical words, uttered with the rough "burr" peculiar to my native shire, had impressed me deeply.

"Good day, miss," she said, as I turned in at the wicket-gate which led into North-over Park,—“It do seem sad to leave them lying there all by themselves!” and so we separated.

The years that have intervened since this day and the time at which I am writing, have not been so many but that I can recall distinctly every one of the impressions it left with me, and trace their influence upon my future actions. Foremost amongst these, I remember, as I walked home through the feathery bracken, was the notion that, on account of my father's unfortunate condition, I might be looked upon for the rest of my days as a creature

upon whom some sort of hereditary curse had descended. I wondered, now, whether this state of mental degeneracy might not have set in, in some form, previous to my mother's death, when I had been too young to observe it; and whether, in consequence, she might not have been less happy with him, perhaps, than had been generally supposed? I realised to-day, more clearly than I had ever done before, that my father regarded me with feelings of absolute indifference—if not of positive dislike—and that, but for Mason and Miss Warden, the world would have been singularly empty for me of all sympathy and love. I was within sight, now, of the grey garden terrace, with its statues and urns standing out in bold relief against the dark yew hedge at the back; and I could see, in fancy, the lithe active figure of Prince Crecszoleski vaulting lightly over the low balustrade. Was I so

rich (I asked myself) in earthly friendship, or affection, that I could afford to despise and cast from me either the one or the other? Ought I not, on the contrary, to feel touched at, and grateful for, the faintest show of kindly interest? And supposing (only "*supposing*") any such interest on the part of the Prince should ever ripen into anything deeper and more permanent, would it not be some sort of gratification to my offended vanity to be able to prove to my cousin Courtenay—(Courtenay, who was admitted now, as though he had been a son, to the bedside of my father, whilst I, his own daughter, would "only be in the way!")—that, without troubling my mind in the least about him or his matrimonial projects, I had actually succeeded, before I was twenty years old, in making the conquest of this handsome and distinguished stranger?

But then the Prince had said nothing whatever about either love or marriage in connection with myself.

"Marriage, affection, have not hitherto entered into the programme of my existence," (he had said to me in the garden); "till now, all women have seemed to me like dolls."

Ah! but the "*hitherto*," and the "*till now*"? Were not these words intended to have a special significance, and might it not be in order to enlarge upon them more fully that he had begged me to grant him an interview in the old summer-house? Were I to keep to my original intention, and follow the impulses evoked by the impressions of the day, the last point had certainly been gained by the Prince. The words of the poor woman at the grave of the carpenter, seemed to warn me that one might be too obdurate, as well as too im-

pressionable, and that it was possible, when it was too late, to suffer for the one as severely as for the other; and then, over and above everything, I was imbued with the strange conviction, that my help was necessary to rescue and comfort a troubled and afflicted spirit.

I found Miss Warden with the tea-things before her, awaiting me in the drawing-room. She wondered where I could have been all this long time; the tea must have become quite cold! I told her that I was neither hungry nor thirsty. As I was going upstairs to my room, she exclaimed, suddenly—

“What a blessing it is, Helen, to think that your friend is a real Prince, for good and all; that he won’t turn out, as foreign Princes so constantly do, to be a waiter, or a courier, or an escaped forger! I have quite lost the feeling that there is anything about

him in the least like Eugene Aram. He shook hands — of this I took particular notice—with his right hand; and Mr. Collingwood said that he belonged to one of the most illustrious families in Poland, which is now very nearly extinct.”

“He told me,” I said, “that he had one only sister.”

“Yes; and he possesses an enormous estate, too; with a house which is quite a palace, surrounded by forests crawling alive with wolves and wild boars. This, he informed me, he is very anxious to sell, if he possibly can—(his sister and he have agreed upon this between them, and there is a gentleman in treaty for it now);—after which his dream of happiness is to settle in England, with an English wife, and devote himself to philosophical (I think he said ‘philosophical’) studies.”

“He said all this to you yesterday?”

"Yes; and he said it in such a very significant way, whilst we were looking over the pictures. He seems very gentle and serious, and not at all proud. There's only one thing I don't quite like about him."

"And that is?"—I began, wishing to annex every random impression.

"I fear," Miss Warden answered, ominously, "that his constitution is anything but robust! There is a very curious light in his eyes, which goes, I have always noticed, with great delicacy, and he has such dark lines underneath them. I must find out, through the cards, whether he is destined to be very short-lived, because this is a most important consideration. Poor dear young man! I'm afraid he smokes too many of those nasty cigarettes, and drinks too much of that dreadful green tea."

My kind friend could scarcely have ut-

tered these words at a more critical moment. Compassion, as I have already said (wherefore implanted in me for this total stranger I knew not), was, at this time, one of the feelings uppermost in my mind. Apart from this sentiment, and a sudden realizing of my own desolate position, I was aware of no compelling impulse. Had I been conscious that I was a prey to any kind of alluring temptation, I might, perhaps, have summoned to my aid stronger powers of resistance.

As it was, I merely said to myself, with a recklessness begotten of heart-hunger and humiliation, mingling with compassion, and a little, perhaps, with a thirst after some sort of dramatic adventure—

“I am despised and rejected by the one whose duty it should be to love and cherish me. I have nobody to care for but my governess and my old nurse. My father is

“seriously unwell,” but he refuses to see me. He tells me that I shall be “only in the way.” If he dies, I shall be at once turned out of house and home by my cousin Courtenay, whom I cannot bear. A rich and good-looking foreign Prince appears as if he could care for me. He has asked me to meet him to-night in the garden, and meet him I will, whatever may come of it in the future; and I will marry him, too, should he desire it, and elope with him by a ladder of ropes! He is unhappy and lonely, and disappointed with his life. Like me, he is longing for sympathy and affection. And then, how romantic and unexpected is all this! A Prince, and a garden, and a moon! It is just like something one reads about in a book!”

By half-past seven I had written a letter to the Prince, with a brand-new quill pen, in my boldest and most flourishing hand. I

felt that it would be unnecessary to say more than these few words :—

“To-morrow evening (Friday), at ten o'clock, I will be in the old summer-house, as you wished;” and I then added, lest he should fancy that I had been impelled by the power of his will, “I am coming of my own accord; this has nothing to do with mesmerism.”

It was fortunate (I thought, as I directed the envelope) that—thanks to Mr. Collingwood—I knew the correct way of spelling the Prince's name!

I do not suppose that a man is often able to realise the various combining circumstances, utterly independent of all personal influence or persuasion, which may sometimes induce an inexperienced and impressionable woman to submit herself to the dictates of his will. Men and women appear to be guided, usually, by totally different

instincts, and, to one another, their several aims and aspirations must nearly always seem like sealed books.

I wonder whether it is the same with the males and females of birds, beasts, and fishes, who appear—to *us*, at least—to understand each other so well ?

CHAPTER XI.

No event occurred to make any change in my plans before Friday evening. I realised, however, as the day wore on, that a change had taken place in myself. I was no longer nervous, excited, impelled—as it had seemed—by the voices of duty and compassion alike, to respond to Prince Crecszoleski's appeal. In this respect I had become totally indifferent. I would keep to the appointment because I had written to say that I would do so, that is, supposing it did not rain; but I had ceased to imagine that a

suffering elbow-creature would derive any comfort from my resolve.

At about half-past nine o'clock I threw a light shawl over my shoulders—as I was wearing only a thin evening dress—and went out through the drawing-room window upon the moon-lit terrace, saying to Miss Warden that I meant to stroll about the garden till bed-time.

I know now—though I did not know it then—that I did not feel in the least as if I was about to keep an assignation with a lover. No faltering feet; no changing colour; no impetuous heart-beating! But I remember thinking, in a foolish, school-girlish, kind of way, that the “situation” at least, was romantic, and out of the common order, and that it could be scarcely possible—even in a novel—for the accessories of a love-scene to be more effectively grouped and disposed. I experienced, too, a

certain satisfying sense as of a purpose—or rather of a penance—achieved; independent altogether of any personal emotion to be derived from it; just as the prisoner who has been helping to build the wall which shuts him away from the world; or the monk who has been engaged in the digging of his own grave, may feel some sort of conscientious satisfaction at the completion of his labour.

The night was lovely, and as I stood upon the garden-terrace, and gazed over the park, my whole being seemed to become inspired and spiritualised by the intense beauty of the scene. The moon, I thought to myself, was exactly what a moon ought to be. Full enough to bathe the far landscape in a vague, mysterious, radiance; and yet, not one of those staring, hare-faced moons, whose rays are almost as indiscreet as those of the sun.

The great forest trees lay massed together

amongst their shadows, and the wandering streamlet was glistening like burnished silver. The deer seemed all to have retired to their ferny couches, but a couple of hares were feeding together,—out in the open, by which I knew that—as yet, at least—no human footstep could be approaching.

It is difficult upon such occasions—even where falterings and heart-beatings are wanting—to compute with anything like accuracy the passing of minutes. I know not, therefore, how long I may have lingered in the full moonlight—a quarter of an hour, perhaps; or, it may be, not nearly so much—then I turned down the shady walk to the right, went into the old summer-house, and seated myself in one of the rustic chairs.

Over the low stone balustrade upon the opposite side of the narrow pathway, I could see the further woodlands shrouded in soft vapoury mist, and the patch of moonlit

forest-glade in the midst of which the two hares were still feeding. I should know, by watching the behaviour of these hares, when the Prince was on his way towards me through the deer-park.

It seemed a long time before I saw them skurrying away, helter-skelter, into the adjacent covert, and longer still—considering the shortness of the distance—before I became aware of a muffled footfall upon the grass, and the quick breathing of a human being upon the other side of the terrace-walk. Then a male figure leapt over the balustrade and crossed the pathway.

I rose from my chair and went to the rustic porch.

It was not the Prince !

“Mr. Collingwood !” I exclaimed, starting back in amazement, as I recognised my god-father.

“Ah, Helen,” he said, apologetically,

rather than reproachfully, as he took both my hands in his, "I know, too well, that I'm not the person you expected! Don't think, however, that I came here to scold you. Sit down, my child, and let us talk it all over."

He drew me to the rustic chair from which I had just risen, and sat down upon another by my side.

I felt too bewildered, and too ashamed, to utter a word.

I despaired of being able to make him understand the subtle and mysterious influences which had combined together to drive me to this imprudent act, and felt that I would rather he should look upon me as indiscreet, and absurdly romantic, than that he should fancy that I sought to excuse myself by what would seem to him like a distortion of facts.

"You hear me, Helen?" he asked, lean-

ing towards me, after we had remained for some seconds in silence. "You see, dear, that I am not angry with you? I came to advise you as a true friend."

He spoke very earnestly, and I perceived that he seemed to be much agitated.

"I am ashamed and surprised," I faltered, hanging my head. "Tell me, where is the Prince?"

"In London, at this moment. I expect him back again to-morrow. Perhaps you would like to know, before we speak of other things, how I come to be here in his place?"

I nodded assent, and he continued—

"I don't know whether he may have told you or not, but Hugo Crecszoleski has a sister, older than he is by at least ten years. Long ago, when I was at the Embassy in Paris, she was living in Paris too. I got to know her pretty well, and since then she occasionally writes to me. She is a clever,

eccentric, fascinating woman, and was, at that time, very beautiful. She has obtained a good deal of influence over those with whom she has become intimate, and prides herself upon this faculty. To her brother her will seems to be law. She can make him, apparently, do just what she pleases. Well, this lady arrived suddenly in London on Wednesday night, and wrote to inform me that as it was absolutely necessary she should consult with her brother at once upon very important business, she proposed running down here on Thursday morning and staying for a few days."

"And she is here now?" I interrupted, wondering what connection this lady could possibly have with my affairs.

"Indeed, no! I wrote to tell her that I could not possibly receive her. My father is very old and nervous, new arrivals disturb and upset him. She is a restless, excitable

person, different, in this respect, from her brother. Upon receiving my letter, this morning, she telegraphed to Hugo to come up to London immediately, upon this same very important business."

"And he went up at once?"

"No; I saw, and was surprised to see, that, for once, he hesitated to obey her. He seemed much put out at her message, and sent one back to know whether to-morrow wouldn't suit her as well. Her answer was, that she must see him to-day, whereupon he started off by the next train."

The Prince's absence was thus satisfactorily explained, but I had yet to learn how Mr. Collingwood had become aware of his intended meeting with me.

By-and-by he went on, in a tone which still betrayed some emotion,

"I saw him off in the hall, and he drove

away. . When I turned to go back to my room a letter was lying upon the floor. It had no envelope, and I picked it up, thinking I must have dropped it myself. "Northover Park" was upon the writing-paper. Ah! Helen! You will never know what came into my heart as I read your words! What regrets, what hopes and fears, what dreams and memories, were awakened as I looked at your peculiar but beautiful handwriting! For one moment my heart grew warm again with the delicious emotions of youth, and I half imagined that your letter must have been intended for myself!"

"For yourself?" I exclaimed in bewilderment. I was utterly at a loss to comprehend his words. By-and-by, however, a light seemed to break in on me.

"You were reminded, you mean, of something that once happened to yourself? Of somebody you once cared for?"

"Yes, the first, the last, real love of my life, will ever be associated in my mind with just such a moonlight meeting as this, to which I was summoned by just such a letter as yours. 'But enough of myself and my departed dreams! I am here to speak to you about yourself! Do you really imagine, Helen, that you are in love with this man?'"

I knew not how to answer this question. I realised that, in his eyes, my conduct could only seem explicable by reason of some sudden and uncontrollable infatuation for his guest, which had had the effect of scattering my prudence to the four winds.

"I don't know," I faltered at length. "I cannot say as yet. It has all been so strange and so sudden."

"Well, dear, whether you care for him or not, you must let me say my say. I am not going to abuse him. I see, as well as you can, all that must make him attractive

to a young creature in your lonely position. I believe him to be an amiable and chivalrous man, who can be trusted implicitly with a woman's honour. But to trust a man for an hour is a different thing to trusting him for a lifetime, and I must implore of you, my child, if this is nothing more than a mere girlish flirtation, to let it pass quietly out of your mind when the object of it departs, on Monday, from this place. Hugo Crecszoleski is a strange, incomprehensible being. He is not governed by any of the ordinary laws which control civilized man. He is a mystic, an impressionist. He listens to, and obeys, voices that nobody else can hear. He will seem, perhaps, to be absorbed in some project. A mysterious message comes to him, the whole plan is abandoned, all interest in it ceases at once! He may care for you now, perhaps, or he may merely imagine that, for some

occult reason, it is necessary to him to secure your love. Were he to marry you, he might be, for a time, the tenderest and most devoted of husbands; then, one of these extraordinary impressions might come to him, and he would reorganise the whole plan of his existence. You would be powerless to reason with him—tears, entreaties, would have no sort of effect—and were you to place yourself in open opposition to these hidden forces, I tremble to think of what the consequences might be. Consider, my child, whether it would be wise for a woman to confide her happiness to such a man?"

"You know nothing more against him than this?" I asked, my inveterate love for everything that was strange, and unconventional, causing me to be rather attracted than repelled by this aspect of the Prince's character.

“Nothing whatever; I don’t even know that he’s a member of a secret society, or plotting—like so many of his countrymen—to free his nation from the tyranny of Russia! His title is a genuine title; he belongs to one of the most ancient and illustrious families in Poland; where he possesses an extensive tract of country, and he seems to have an unlimited supply of cash. He must need it, too, for, to judge by the letters which are forwarded to him here, he pursues his unprofitable researches in every corner of the globe. Most of his countrymen, and countrywomen, that I have known, have had an insatiable craving for gambling. His sister possesses this failing, and Crees-zoleski may have played a little, too, when the thing has come in his way; but he appears to be the slave of no passion. Believe me, Helen, he will never be the slave of any woman, either—in the sense in which

the term is generally understood; nor will the woman who marries him have gained even a reliable master. She who hopes for a friend, a lover, a protector, will find out, too late, that she has linked her existence with a shadow. Turn all this over in your mind, and pause, for God's sake, before you allow yourself to become involved with this strange being! Honestly, I believe that both he and his sister are a little mad,—not mad enough to be shut up; but too mad to rely upon for one's happiness: *toqués*, as they say over in France."

"Everybody seems to be mad!" I exclaimed, petulantly. "I have no doubt that, to you, I seem mad myself!"

"No, dear," he answered, assuming a more comfortable tone; "I see exactly how all this came about. It all comes of the unnatural, solitary life you are leading down here. You ought to be taken out in Lon-

don

don ; to go to balls and parties ; and mingle with young people of your own age. You ought to be married to some good, honest, sensible man, not to a poor, half-cracked dreamer of dreams ; and then you would be as happy as possible ! ”

I felt somewhat aggrieved at this purely practical view of the case.

“ Indeed,” I said, “ I shouldn’t care for balls and parties, or to live amongst the London fogs ! And, I assure you, it isn’t that I am so very anxious to be married. . . ”

I broke off. The utter hopelessness of endeavouring to explain to another what I could not altogether explain to myself, overcame me with despair, and blinding tears rushed to my eyes.

“ I see, I see, my child,” answered my godfather, cheerfully, “ you don’t care to be married, but you want somebody to love—somebody to whose happiness you are neces-

sary. Your heart is unoccupied, and so you fancy that you are in love with the first man who crosses your path, and who happens to possess an attractive appearance. But there is no need to be in a hurry. Things will all come right, believe me, if you only give yourself time. All your friends about here are anxious to help you. We all see the dangers and difficulties of your present position. I was speaking of this to your governess the other night. I, for one, however, have not yet given up all hope of another marriage for you—a marriage which your poor mother always spoke of, and which Sir Harry, when he conducted himself more like other people, used to look upon as very desirable. I believe that it might easily be brought about, if only you could be thrown together. I allude to your marriage with Courtenay Davenant.”

"I hate the very name of Courtenay Davenant!" I exclaimed passionately,—glad of a scapegoat upon whom I could let loose some of my nervous irritation.

"The little Nelly that I used to play with in the old days seems to have grown into a very desperate and determined character," said Mr. Collingwood, smiling sadly. "I hardly think that you would hate him were you to meet him now, for he's one of the nicest fellows imaginable. He and I are capital friends, and if he were only in England, I would ask him down here, later on, for the shooting, and do everything in my power to bring you together."

"It would be no use," I answered, hardening my heart; "he objects to the marriage of first cousins, and so do I."

"Oh, that's all nonsense!" rejoined my godfather lightly. "If you and he could only get to know one another we should

soon hear no more of such silly notions! But it is getting late, and I shall have to leave you. Promise me two things, Helen, before I go. First, that you will reflect well upon all I have said to you before you do anything decisive; and, secondly, that should you ever require the protection or advice of a friend, you will apply to me wherever I may happen to be." He again took my hands in his, drew me towards him, and looked at me earnestly and appealingly. "I promise," I answered, impressed by the earnestness of his manner.

He covered my hands with kisses—despairing kisses as I should have fancied, if only he had been a younger man—and rose to go. I perceived that he was deeply affected; but could not explain the nature of his emotion.

As he went out of the summer-house he pulled some blossoms from the sprays of

honeysuckle that clustered about the entrance, and pressed them to his lips.

“I shall keep these as a remembrance of your promise,” he said—“of our meeting this evening, and of this lovely and hallowed spot! . . . Good night!”

CHAPTER XII.

I HOPED, afterwards, that Mr. Collingwood wholly understood that, by the words "I promise," I meant that I would indeed reflect upon his warning, and regard him ever as my true friend for having uttered it, reserving for myself, however, full liberty of action after fulfilling his wishes in these two respects.

Be this how it may, in less than a month from the time of this friendly warning, after much painful uncertainty and wavering of purpose, I yielded to what seemed to me like an irresistible pressure, proceeding, as

it were, from every point of the compass, and was married privately to Hugo Crecszoleski in a London church.

It all came to pass after the following fashion :—The Prince called upon me at Northover upon his return from London. With Mr. Collingwood's words still ringing in my ears, I listened in a somewhat critical spirit to his explanations, eagerly on the look out for any inaccuracies which might occur in his narrative. It corresponded, however, exactly with what I had already heard, and I was favourably impressed at perceiving how conscientiously precise this man of mysteries had been in his account of all that had occurred.

He was vexed beyond measure, he said, at his sister's unexpected summons. He had endeavoured, at first, to procure a delay of twelve hours, and had telegraphed to her to this effect. Her reply was that she must

see him immediately, and he responded at once to what he now regarded as the voice of Destiny.

“When an obstacle to any cherished project arises in your path,” he said, “it is wise to commence by battling with it. When, however, it re-appears, in spite of opposition, you become aware that a force is in motion which it is beyond your power to resist, that a voice is speaking which must utter the last word. To the dictates of what other mentor are we to listen?”

He spoke with so much apparent fervour of conviction that I was afraid he would have thought me old-fashioned, and commonplace, if I had ventured to say anything about prayer or the dictates of conscience!

His interview with his sister, he next informed me, had been productive of very satisfactory results.

She had desired to consult him with

regard to the sale of his Polish estates—a project they had both contemplated for years. The Prince was the last male representative of his family. His sister was a widow and childless. She had hitherto preferred wandering from place to place to remaining in a fixed home; and if she ever made up her mind to settle permanently it would probably be in Paris, Petersburg, Vienna,—some large city, for she held the country in utter abomination. They had decided between them, therefore, that if only a purchaser could be found it would be to their mutual advantage to dispose of the property.

“I am deeply interested,” the Prince had proceeded to explain, “in researches which it is very difficult for me to pursue in such an out-of-the-way place. I should never reside there, in consequence. I have gone there, perhaps, once or twice, for the sake

of the hunting, in the last five or six years, but this is all. Were I to marry, I could never condemn my wife to bury herself in such a desolate place—she would object to it as much as did my sister. I have memories about it, it is true, but they are not all pleasant ones, and memories may be made wherever we like ! The money that should come to me by this sale would enable me greatly to extend the field of my philosophical and psychical investigations, and I should be able, also, to purchase an English estate, and thus make my principal home in the centre of an enlightened civilisation.”

But a rambling, medieval castle—partly ruinous, and wholly out of repair, although some portions of the surrounding estate were extremely profitable, and might, with attention, be made to produce far more than they did at present—did not appear,

to many people, evidently, to be a very desirable possession, and for years, now, the Prince and his sister had almost despaired of finding a purchaser.

“*Mais tout vient à qui sait attendre,*” the Prince had gone on to say. “My sister, when in Paris the other day, falls in, in the most curious manner in the world, with an English gentleman, engaged in commerce—a Mr. Marks, or Mark—who, quite by accident, meeting my sister in the public reading-room of an hotel, addresses her in a few polite phrases. My sister replies; they talk upon various subjects. The conversation, by one of those remarkable coincidences which we are, as yet, powerless to explain, turns upon the purchase of landed estates, and it then transpires that Mr. Marks—an enthusiastic lover of the chase, especially of that of wolves and wild boar—has long desired to

purchase a property in Poland precisely of the description of that which we have for long been so anxious to sell! He is English—a cultivated obliging person—speaking fluently both Polish and German. Money is no object to him whatever; the preliminaries of the bargain are, then and there, arranged by my sister, subject, of course, to my approval. I could scarcely have hoped for such a remarkable stroke of good fortune!”

Mr. Marks, it appeared, had made only one stipulation—a very reasonable one, as Prince Crecszoleski readily admitted. He desired to rent the castle for the period of one year, before finally concluding the purchase, which was to depend upon whether the climate suited him, and whether the hunting answered his expectations.

The Prince's sister, “Delphine,” as he

called her, came over to London as soon as the negotiations had proceeded thus far, but she was only able to remain in England for a few days, and hence her anxiety to consult with her brother at once.

Their interview passed off very satisfactorily. Mr. Marks was to take up his abode at the castle as soon as possible. He demanded no repairs, desiring that the place should be left just as it was, and agreed to pay an excellent rent. So impatient was he to conclude the arrangement, indeed, and so sanguine did he seem about it, that he scarcely glanced at the photograph of the castle which Delphine had procured for his inspection. It was as though the whole transaction had been to him like the realisation of a dream. His enthusiasm knew no bounds. If only he continued in this same mind the Prince had no doubt but that the purchase would

be concluded as soon as the year had expired. And then, after he had informed me of all these details, Hugo Crecszoleski asked me if I would become his wife.

"You need not now be exiled," he said, "to these barbaric regions! We can choose our new home. It shall spring up wheresoever you may command. With you at my side, I feel that it may be possible for me to achieve great things. A wife like you, with a strong, magnificent individuality, is what I have hitherto needed to complete my nature."

I was imbued with the consciousness that, sooner or later, for some mysterious reason, this marriage must take place, and that nothing in heaven or earth, or in the waters under the earth, would be able to prevent it; but I felt no awakening of a warmer sympathy towards the man who was destined to become my husband.

I remarked, too, that, whilst addressing me kindly and respectfully, the Prince made no protestations of violent affection, in the sincerity of which, considering the shortness of our acquaintance, I might have found it difficult to believe; nor did he appear to require any such assurances upon my part.

This forbearance seemed to make my own course a thousand times easier, and I thanked him sincerely, in my heart, for having made no attempt to work upon my feelings.

I discussed the subject of our marriage with him reasonably, calmly, dispassionately—the unaccountable sense, as of predestination, which I have already described, causing my words to seem, all the while, like a mockery to myself.

I told him that I did not consider that we had known each other long enough to

marry; that my father was an irritable invalid, who had lately become worse, so that, just at present, I should not dare to speak to him upon the subject of any engagement that I might form. Then, thinking of what Mr. Collingwood had said about linking myself to a shadow, I asked him whether he was not of too roving and visionary a disposition to care for the calm delights of home life, and whether a wife could ever hope to have any real part in the existence of one who was so absorbed in mystic lore, and who acted in obedience to laws which she would probably never be able to understand?

To these questions he only answered, smiling quietly, and not at all ill-naturedly—

“Ah! so my good friend George has been traducing me to you during my absence, and this is all he can tell you to

my disadvantage! George, as you must have perceived, is pre-eminently a materialist—"a sensualist," I may almost add. He has no sympathy, whatever, with the spiritual aspects of life. These things are purely constitutional, and we are not responsible for them. 'Let us eat, drink, and be merry—everything else is nothing!' expresses his creed to the letter. You will have observed this, as you know him well, and also, that the best of everything must always be for himself; nobody else must approach it until it has ceased to please him—then it may go—anybody may take it who likes! He thrusts from him, persistently, everything that, by awakening the nobler emotions, might interfere with his personal complacency. His highest aim in life is to be perpetually comfortable!"

I had remarked, certainly, in Mr. Collingwood's conversation, a decided vein of

practical materialism. I looked upon it as his only fault, and excused it on the ground of his having lived so much abroad, in flip-pant, frivolous society, where pleasure was sought after rather than happiness, and where people, and things, were valued less for their intrinsic worth than for the amusement which could be derived from them at the moment. His genial, sanguine, disposition, led him, no doubt, to shrink from, and ignore, much that was gloomy, disagreeable, and irremediable ; but this characteristic rendered him, probably, all the more anxious to protect others from what he dreaded himself ; and I could not doubt, after my interview with him in the summer-house, that he was possessed, at any rate, of a kind and affectionate heart. I realised, however, that he might possibly feel but little sympathy for the tenets of an ascetic mysticism.

With the view of overcoming my other objections, the Prince suggested that I should arrange to stay with my father in London. Had Mr. Marks desired any repairs, or alterations, at the ancestral *château* he would have felt bound to superintend them himself, which would have obliged him to leave England at once. As it was, however, the accommodating behaviour of his tenant had relieved him of all further trouble, and as his sister had consented to arrange the terms of the lease with Mr. Marks, in Paris, he was now entirely at my disposal. My father, being an invalid, would be unlikely, he said, to interfere with my movements. That "amiable lady," my "duenna," might be taken into our confidence. If permitted to do so, he should esteem it a privilege to escort us over the sights of London. We might visit the picture-galleries, the

theatres, and attend, with him, some of the lectures and *séances* which treated of those spiritual matters in which he was so profoundly interested. In this way, he said, we should soon become better acquainted, and if, after this fuller acquaintance, I found that he was not personally disagreeable to me, we might arrange to be married at once. Supposing that my father's critical condition made me still unwilling to speak to him upon the subject, or supposing that, because the Prince was a foreigner, objections and difficulties were raised which might turn to my eventual disadvantage, it would be as well, perhaps, to take the law into our own hands, and to be married privately. In London this could very easily be managed, and we could afterwards wait, either until Sir Harry was in a less precarious state of health, or until I attained my majority, before we publicly

announced our marriage to the world. All this would be for me to consider.

I promised that I would turn the matter over in my mind, though I could hold out but little hope of being able to go up to London—my father having just refused my request to be allowed to attend upon him during his illness.

Prince Crecszoleski then asked me, for the second time, whether I had had any previous attachment, and again I replied in the negative.

“Then we shall be married,” he said, quietly; and after he had given me his London address, and raised my hand respectfully to his lips, he forthwith took his departure.

CHAPTER XIII.

As soon as the Prince had quitted our neighbourhood, "the plot," (to use Miss Warden's absurd expression,) began to "thicken" rapidly. The first sign of this took the form of a letter from Colonel Davenant to myself, which arrived in the course of a few days, and which ran as follows :—

"DEAR MISS DAVENANT,

"It is so long since we met, that I dare hardly hope you will still remember my existence. I venture to recall myself to

your memory, however, thinking that you may like to hear the last news of Sir Harry. I have just returned from sitting with him now, and am glad to be able to give you a favourable report.

“ I interviewed the doctor, who says that, with perfect quiet and good nursing, he may very soon be himself again, and that the unfavourable symptoms may disappear. My uncle was kind enough to ask me to go down to Northover, next month, for some partridge-shooting, or later on, in October. I have just been invited to stay at Lord Silchester's on the 5th September, and would propose to come on from there to Northover about the 8th or 9th, if it would be convenient to you to receive me at that time. I go down to Cowes this afternoon, and, as I propose yachting with a friend after to-morrow, and may not be sure of receiving my letters, it would be very kind

of you if you would let me have an answer by telegram to the Royal Yacht Squadron, Cowes, Isle of Wight.

“Looking forward to the pleasure of seeing you again soon,

“ Believe me to be,

“ Yours very sincerely,

“ COURTENAY DAVENANT.”

To anybody but to me, this would surely have seemed to be a very natural and inoffensive letter for a young man to have written to his female cousin, erring, if it erred at all, rather on the side of unnecessary formality, considering the relationship, than on that of officiousness or impertinence. But, just at this time, Courtenay Davenant could do nothing right in my eyes. I remember, now, that, as I read, I was inclined to take almost every word amiss.

“How soon he rushed over from abroad when he heard that Sir Harry had been taken ill!” I thought to myself. “He is like a cormorant, coming after the loaves and fishes! Does he suppose that, because I am not in London, I hold no communication whatever with my father’s household and that he is doing me a great favour in writing to me about his health? ‘I interviewed the doctor!’ . . . To find out, of course, if his uncle was in any real danger, and how long it was likely to be before he might expect to succeed him, in order that he might make his plans accordingly! And then, as he chanced to be now in England, it had occurred to him, probably, that there would be no harm, after all, in just running down to Northover and taking a glance at the cousin whose existence he had seemed to ignore for so long; and hence this plausible, hypocritical, letter. ‘Looking

forward to the pleasure' of seeing me soon, and so on! . . . If, after I, too, had been 'interviewed,' my manner and appearance happened to please his critical eye, then, who could say what great honour might not be reserved for me! If not, there would be no harm done—to *himself*, at any rate!

"He would be able to look over the house and property that might so soon become his own, and he would have done his country cousin a kindness by condescending to visit her at all! But it is too late! it is too late!" I thought, as with a sense of triumph. "I do not care, now, whether you come and see me or not! I have done for ever with the family marriage-project!"

Nevertheless, I suppose I should have replied to his letter by begging him to do as he proposed about coming to Northover,

were it not that, immediately after my receipt of it, events began shaping themselves hurriedly according to the wishes of Prince Crecszoleski.

My father became rapidly worse ; he was attacked with paralysis, and remained for some days in an unconscious state. His doctor telegraphed for me at once, and in little more than a week from the time of the Prince's departure, Miss Warden, Mason, and I, found ourselves established in London, at an hotel in the vicinity of Berkeley Square.

In the hurry of my departure from home, I entirely forgot all about my cousin and his letter. Miss Warden reminded me of it, however, when we were on our way to the station, and that it had required an immediate answer. We were late for our train, so I had only time to leave orders with the footman that he was to telegraph to Colonel

Davenant in my name, and inform him that, as I had been suddenly summoned to London, I should not be at Northover at the time of his proposed visit. Then the train went off, and I altogether dismissed both him and his letter from my mind.

Sir Harry's bachelor rooms, from which it had not been thought advisable to move him, were close to our hotel, whilst Prince Crecszoleski was staying in St. James's Place.

Wishing to leave my meeting with him entirely to chance, I had not written to inform him of our arrival. The first time, however, that Miss Warden and I went out walking together, we fell in with him in Pall Mall, on his way to the National Gallery, after which he arranged that we should meet, upon one pretence or another, almost every day.

My father had now a professional nurse

in close attendance upon him ; the most perfect quiet had been enjoined ; so that, beyond visiting his rooms every day, and sitting with him whilst the nurse was resting, or at her meals, our time was entirely at our own disposal.

Escorted by the Prince and accompanied by Miss Warden, I visited picture-galleries and museums, and attended lectures and *séances*. In a very little while I felt much more at my ease with him. Occasionally, but not often, I experienced a recurrence of the strange sensation which had oppressed me in the tea-room at Ingleby Grange, but the feeling seemed to become every time less acute and embarrassing. It was as if some sort of controlling power hitherto possessed by the Prince, was gradually becoming exhausted.

I tried very hard at this time to persuade myself that I was in love. In this I could

not altogether succeed; but I developed, during this frequent intercourse, the greatest possible respect for the Prince's character and intelligence, and I had read in books that love generally followed very quickly upon esteem.

Miss Warden, though enthusiastic in her admiration of the Prince's amiable traits, was much embarrassed as to whether she ought to check, or to encourage, our growing intimacy. The cards — to which she turned in her uncertainty — foretold anxieties, travels, surprises, (very much as they always did), a death, and then a fortunate marriage, with one of the most devoted husbands in the world, and beautiful children. The death (she could not help thinking) must be that of "poor Sir Harry." The reign of my cousin Courtenay was evidently drawing nearer and nearer every day!

Was this a time, my kind friend asked herself, to discourage the attentions of a rich and eligible suitor? And yet—seeing that the Prince was a foreigner—a Roman Catholic (as we had lately discovered), and that the whole thing had come about so suddenly—she desired much to find some human monitor to whom she could turn for counsel.

Finally, she had almost decided to write to my god-father, asking him to grant her an interview in order that she might consult with him upon my future prospects, when we saw recorded in the fashionable columns of "The Morning Post" that "The Honourable George Collingwood, Her Majesty's Minister at ——" had "passed through Paris on his way to resume his diplomatic duties;" whereupon her benevolent project necessarily evaporated in smoke.

So the days of a London September went by, (of a London not in the least like the gay city which I have since known, and looked at with altogether different eyes), and "chill October" was at hand once more. By this time I had finally decided to become Prince Crecszoleski's wife, and, after he had made the necessary arrangements, I walked out one morning, unknown to my "duenna," and was married to him according to the rites of the Protestant Church.

"The Protestant religion is quite good enough for me," he had made answer, when I asked him about his theological opinions. "'Heaven is a palace with many doors,' as the Hindoos tell us, 'and each one has a right to enter it his own way.' So let those who find happiness in their purgatories keep to them by all means—the whole four of them! Let the monks of Kiev build

themselves living tombs in the catacombs of the Petcherskoi monastery. It is not our place to sneer at the exaggerations of religious feeling; but for me, Helen, the simple sacraments of your Reformed English Church will suffice."

Our marriage, for the present, at least, was to be kept a profound secret. Not even the Prince's sister, nor my god-father, were to be informed of it as yet. Miss Warden, for the convenience of our future meetings, was taken into our confidence *after the event*, for I feared that if I had told her of our intention beforehand she might be blamed afterwards for her connivance, supposing that my father, upon hearing of the step I had taken, should think fit to visit me with his displeasure.

One other person the Prince asked my permission to trust with our secret—his

valet, Zoubiroff, a keen-eyed, cunning-looking Russian, who had not, somehow, inspired me with unlimited confidence when, upon the occasions of his calling with his master's notes, I had sometimes addressed a few words to him. The Prince assured me, however, that Zoubiroff was under important obligations to him—that he had been in his service for more than fifteen years, and had given repeated proofs of his fidelity and discretion. I did not, therefore, like to refuse my husband his very first request.

Immediately after our marriage we hailed a hansom cab at the church door, and drove to a jeweller's in Bond Street, the Prince desiring that I should select a present as a *souvenir* of the day.

I chose a ring—a “cat's-eye,” surrounded by diamonds, as he seemed determined to give me something expensive. He paid for

it on the spot, and we then re-entered our hansom.

“It will always remind me of your eyes,” I said, as I looked at the ring upon my finger; “the stone is exactly like them in colour!”

I felt in wonderfully good spirits, and fired as with a sense of perilous adventure.

The day, however, which had begun by being fine, had clouded over whilst we were in church, and when I set the Prince down, a few doors from my destination, it was raining hard. He had made elaborate arrangements with me for a longer meeting upon the morrow, so that we did not expect to be parted for more than a few hours.

“*Au revoir, belle Princesse!*” he said, as he held my hand and leant towards me from the street, regardless of the falling rain. For the first time, I perceived an

expression of tenderness in his strange eyes. "*A bientôt, n'est-ce pas ?*" he added; and then the cabman let down the window and drove on.

Upon arriving at the hotel I was informed by the porter that a gentleman had called to see me during my absence, and that, hearing I was expected to return soon, he had waited for me for some time in the reading-room.

I looked at the card which he left for me when he departed, and read, as I half-expected, seeing that I was acquainted with so few "gentlemen"—

"LT.-COLONEL DAVENANT."

and, beneath the name, these few words, written in pencil,—

"Very sorry indeed to have missed seeing

you. Am leaving England to-night for Vienna."

It was quite evident, I thought, that Courtenay and I were not intended to meet again as yet !

CHAPTER XIV.

HUGO's "*bientôt*," as it happened, turned out to be a period of very nearly three months.

On the day following upon our marriage, and before I had had time to see him again, my husband was sent for by his sister to Paris. He left a letter for me to say that he would be back again with all speed. In a few days, however, there came another, informing me that, upon his arrival in the French capital, he was made acquainted with circumstances which would oblige him, after all, to revisit Poland, in order that he might make certain arrangements at his

country-house previous to the occupation of Mr. Marks.

By the time that this business was completed, and the Prince had returned to Paris, my father was considerably better, and we were in daily expectation of his being ordered abroad. I begged, therefore, that the Prince would postpone his return to England for the present, lest, by one of those provoking combinations which sometimes occur, we might be obliged to leave the country immediately upon his arrival in it.

He asked me, in reply, to endeavour to induce the doctors to send Sir Harry to the South of France—to Cannes, Nice, Mentone—anywhere upon the Riviera, as he could then arrange, without exciting suspicion, to come to the same place—to the same hotel even, so that we might “at last pass together our honeymoon so unexpectedly deferred.”

The doctors yielded to my suggestion without any difficulty. The Riviera was the very place to which they had intended sending Sir Harry as soon as he could travel. His health continued to improve steadily after this, and, at the beginning of the New Year, we took our departure from England, and travelled south by easy stages.

We were accompanied by a courier, who had been engaged to valet and look after my father in addition to his other duties, by Mason, and by a professional nurse, who was to attend exclusively to the invalid.

Since my father's paralytic attack his nature seemed to have undergone an entire change for the second time. He was now much more docile and tractable. His mental powers were evidently a good deal impaired; he forgot easily, sometimes even seeming scarcely to recognize us, repeated himself constantly, and laughed and wept

at odd, unaccountable, moments, but he was much more capable than he had been previously of mere animal enjoyment. He slept well, ate heartily, and enjoyed the sunshine, and there were days when he would appear to be even interested in reading the newspapers, and in listening for awhile to our conversation. His mood, in fact, was more like that of a young child, who is cheerful and free from care, in spite of its helpless dependence upon others. He had completely lost the use of his left arm, but could move the right one almost as well as ever, and as the days went by he began to walk a little with the assistance of his attendant.

We had quite decided, now, upon the place at which we intended to sojourn. Our courier, who had been accustomed to travel with persons in delicate health, knew of a quiet and comfortable hotel in the environs of

Nice. It was situated two miles at least from the town (of which, with its life and movement, one might see just as much—or as little—as one desired), upon a southern hill-slope, amongst grey olive-grounds, with a view of snow-capped mountains at the back.

The families that frequented it were chiefly English, our courier informed us, and “very select”—elderly personages of rank, or “clergymen of the Established Church;” for it was too far from the town to be a popular resort with more frivolous pleasure-seekers. Hence it was the place of all others for an invalid. Having made up my mind to endeavour to “love, honour, and obey” the man who could scarcely, as yet, be called my husband, and to consult him upon every subject which could affect our happiness, I wrote to him for instructions immediately upon our arrival at Nice.

He begged me, in reply, to wait for a

day or two until I had ascertained whether the hotel suited us, and then to engage a suite of apartments which should include an additional room communicating with it, as if for an expected friend. When I had done this, I was to make a little plan of the apartment, and send it to him at Monte Carlo, which he intended to make his headquarters for the present, and he would then write to the proprietors of the hotel, or send an emissary, if need be, requesting that a room might be retained for him answering precisely to the description I had furnished of the extra one adjoining our own. The people of the hotel would then be almost certain to ask us to give it up to the Prince, which we should agree to do, after a little show of hesitation, our friend being supposed to have postponed his intended visit.

These somewhat complicated tactics an-

swered perfectly, and I could not repress a feeling of inward triumph when the landlady, after showing us, with pride, the letter which she had just received from the Polish Prince, demanded of us, as a great favour, the sacrifice of our additional bedroom, "*Son Altesse étant un de nos plus anciens clients.*"

At about four o'clock on the following day we were informed that "*Son Altesse*" had arrived. My windows looked out upon the garden, so that I did not see him drive up to the door.

He had considered that it would be wiser, in order to disarm suspicion, not to appear as though he had known us before, but to seem to make our acquaintance by accident, whenever a favourable occasion should present itself. Upon the evening of his arrival, however, as soon as the household had retired to rest, he had arranged to come

through to our sitting-room, and to have an interview with me there.

The hotel at which we were staying, once an Italian palace—and which I shall here call the Villa St. Hippolyte—was large and rambling. Our sitting-room was a spacious apartment, with a vaulted ceiling, appropriately adorned with frescoes representing hovering cupids, and an appearance of faded magnificence. Opening out from it upon the left hand was my bedchamber, looking out, like the sitting-room, into a lovely old terraced garden. Beyond this, again, was Miss Warden's, then Mason's, both having a different aspect, and then came my father's apartments, consisting of several rooms, which he never quitted during the day except when he went out to take the air, and which opened upon a corridor upon the opposite side of the house. To the left of our sitting-room, and likewise opening into

it, was a small anteroom, scarcely more than a cupboard, in which we had deposited our travelling-boxes, and next to this was the apartment now occupied by my husband, which possessed another entrance, leading into a passage so far away from our own that no casual observer would have supposed that any communication existed between the rooms.

It was through this box-room that Hugo was to come to me as soon as everything was quiet. I had obtained possession of the key, which was upon our side of the door, and had only to turn it as soon as the hour appointed for our meeting drew near.

As daylight gradually darkened to dusk I became terribly restless and uneasy; I wondered how the Prince would be able to let me know supposing he had been obliged to make any change in his original plan—whether he had impressed upon Zoubiroff

the importance of discretion, and whether it would be possible, in spite of all our precautions, to keep our secret effectually from the people of the hotel ?

As I reflected thus, feeling very nervous and apprehensive, it occurred to me that I might ask to speak, upon some pretext, with the Prince's valet, that I could then make him a present, enjoin discretion, and inquire after the health of his master.

I consulted with Miss Warden as to what reason we could give for wishing to see him, and she suggested that, as the Prince's room had been engaged by us, in the first instance, for a friend, we might appear desirous of knowing how long he would be likely to require it. The waiter came in at this moment, bringing our lamp. We asked him whether, if Prince Crecszoleski's servant was anywhere within call, we could speak to him upon the subject of his

master's room ? The waiter, a careless Italian youth, darted off at once to do our behest, and in another moment there came a quick rap at the door. We gave permission to enter, and a man stepped into the room from behind the folds of the *portière*. He was a total stranger !

I was so overcome with surprise that I could not summon words to address him.

Miss Warden came to the rescue, and inquired, in French, whether she was speaking to the Prince's valet ?

The stranger replied in the affirmative, and we gathered from his speech that he must be a Frenchman. By this time we had recovered ourselves, and explained, for the sake of something to say, that, expecting an English friend, we had engaged the room which was now occupied by the Prince. Our friend, however, having postponed his visit for awhile, we had given up

the room at the request of the landlady. Could we be informed how long Prince Crecszoleski would be likely to remain at the hotel?

The man replied, very politely, that he did not know. It was possible that his master would only remain till the end of the week, or he might stay on for an indefinite time. It was too soon, as yet, for him to decide. Also, His Highness had not confided to him his intentions. . . .

He bowed respectfully and retired. We experienced a sense of profound relief when the door had closed upon him.

I was much perturbed at discovering that Hugo, who had spoken so highly of Zou-biroff's devotion, should have had reason to dismiss him just after having confided to him our secret, and should find himself compelled to come, attended thus by a total stranger, upon an occasion when the services

of a confidential person would have been of so much value.

As I pondered thus the evening wore on.

We dined as usual at half-past seven, in our own apartments, and at nine o'clock I went to bid my father good-night. Miss Warden remained with me in the sitting-room until ten o'clock, and then retired, after kissing me affectionately.

The evenings were very chilly in spite of the heat of the noon-day sun, and the room with its black marble floor, felt to me cold and tomb-like. I heaped up the fire with logs and fir-cones, pulled down the blower, and succeeded at last in making a cheerful blaze. In the middle of the centre table was a basket of flowers which I had purchased that morning in the town—violets, anemones, and branches of feathery mimosa, which gave forth a delicious perfume. As I looked at these lovely southern blossoms

my thoughts wandered, I know not wherefore, over sea to Northover churchyard. I beheld, in fancy, the nameless grave at which I had knelt and prayed for guidance ; tears came into my eyes, which I could not control, and I wondered whether my mother's pure spirit might not be hovering near me at this supreme moment of my existence.

Feeling that it was impossible to remain still, I set about arranging upon the table the few books and photographs that I had brought with me from England, in order to lend a home-like and familiar air to the apartment. At about eleven o'clock I opened the door and peeped into the passage. The lights were all out, and I could only distinguish a few faint sounds in the far distance. It was evident that all the other occupants of our particular floor, at least, had retired for the night.

With faltering footsteps, I went through the box-room and up to the door of the Prince's room. My hands trembled so that I could scarcely turn the key in the lock. It was a long, awkward, ill-made key—I remember—fitting badly, and it flew back suddenly with quite an alarming noise. I feared that my husband's new valet, if he happened to be in attendance upon him, must certainly have heard it. The room seemed to be perfectly quiet, however. The faint odour of a cigarette was all that came to me through the chinks of the closed door.

I stole back again into the drawing-room and waited. Feeling that I was becoming dreadfully nervous and hysterical, I took up the newspaper and endeavoured to read, but found it utterly impossible to concentrate my thoughts. I saw the printed type, it is true, but its meaning entirely escaped me.

I then endeavoured to lift up my heart in prayer—to pray that my union with Hugo might bring happiness to us both — but alas, with no better result than when I had attempted to read! Finally, I drew the sofa to the hearth and fell to wondering, as I gazed into the midst of the glowing embers, how the Prince would look; what he would be likely to say; whether he would seem to me to be the same person as the one with whom I had parted in London; or, as happens sometimes, even after a shorter separation, an altogether different being? Whether his face would look tender, or weary, or a little cruel and untamed, as I had fancied that I had seen it look now and then? . . .

As I was musing thus, an old legend recurred to me, about a maiden who had promised herself to a lover who turned out to be a spectre, having only the outward similitude

of man, with none of his passions or affections. A pale, ghostly bridegroom, whose steely eye-balls glittered in the wintry moonlight, whose heart lay frost-bound in his hollow breast, and the kiss of whose ghastly lips meant death! Then I thought of how terrible it would be if, through some error or misunderstanding, the room—the door of which I had just unlocked so noisily—had not been given to the Prince at all, but to some other man, who, bent upon looking into the cause of this sudden turning of his key, might walk in through the box-room, and confront me, at any moment. I said to myself that, if this were to happen, and supposing that a stranger were to appear before me at this hour, the state of my nerves was such that I should probably scarcely survive the shock!

I have said before how utterly impossible I have always found it, in moments of

emotion and suspense, to compute, with anything like correctness, the passing of time. I know not, therefore, how long it may have been before I heard the door upon the further side of the box-room opened cautiously, and the Prince's footsteps stealthily approaching.

I looked up at him as he came in at the door, but felt that it would have been utterly impossible for me to have risen from my place. I saw that he was wearing a long wrapper, or dressing-suit of dark silk trimmed with sables, and that he held a candle in his hand which cast sharp lights and shadows upon his picturesque face.

Before speaking to me he went straight to the other door and secured it. As I heard the key turn in the lock my heart seemed to stand still with emotion. For the first time since my marriage, I realized that I had promised to give myself, body and soul,

into the power of this man, and my heart failed me.

He came towards me ; I could only stare blankly in his face.

I saw that he looked neither tender, nor weary, nor cruel. He looked *triumphant* ; the look of all others which, in some circumstances, must seem least congenial to a woman's feelings.

I shrank back instinctively. He came to me, took my hand, drew me to the sofa, and looked in my face inquiringly. Then he asked me to tell him, once, of my own free will, whether I thought I now cared for him a little ?

I knew not what to answer at that moment which should not wound or disappoint him ; so, to gain time, I stroked the sable upon the breast of his coat with the hand he had left me free ; smoothing it down the right way of the fur, and feeling

the while as if I must soon break down and begin weeping:

Now that my hand was so close to his heart I could feel that it was beating violently. It came into my mind that although wild and uncontrollable passions might be lying, as it were in ambush, beneath that smooth brown fur, yet, because of this, I was assuredly not in the presence of any spectre bridegroom, but of a being of flesh and blood, and this reflection had the effect of somewhat restoring my courage.

"I suppose that you have 'willed' all this?" I found voice to say at last.

"Ah, Helen!" he answered, as though half reproachfully, "cannot you see that all my will has departed? When we, in our family, realize that our power of will has gone from us, we know well what it signifies!"

"Why have you lost it?" I asked, wondering. "You look the same—better than you did before. Why do you say your will is gone?"

"I have lost it," he answered, opening his arms to me; "because the moment has come when, for the first time, I can truly love! A new life opens before me, of which you are the absolute controller; I give into your keeping both my will and my heart!"

Then, looking up, I beheld, just over my head, the merry group of rosy Loves, sporting, like circling butterflies, amongst the blue and amber clouds upon the ceiling, and I remembered that this was the meeting to accomplish which I had been planning and plotting for weeks.

How often have I beheld them since—in fancy—those circling cupids! Somebody told me, the other day, that the beautiful old villa St. Hippolyte was now all deserted

and dismantled ; that bills of sale were set up in its broken windows, and that the lovely terraced-garden was all parcelled out into building lots. It was said that it was about to be pulled down, and that smaller villas were to be erected upon its site. And so, I suppose, that the dancing cupids are gone too, by this time,—fallen for ever from their high estate in the blue empyrean, and will never be able to look down from it at any honeymooning couples again !

CHAPTER XV.

It was a great relief to me when the Prince, having made acquaintance, one morning with my father in the garden, was enabled to visit us openly, and accompany us upon our walks and drives.

Seeing that he was a personage of distinction, speaking English, too, with a fluency suggestive of English sympathies and associations, and seeing, too, that we were the only English family of any consideration at that time sojourning at the hotel, it must have appeared quite natural to the proprietors that he should prefer our

society to that of the other visitors, and the rapid growth of our friendship seemed to be regarded with benevolent approbation by both landlord and landlady, who perceived that, by reason of it, the Prince would be likely to prolong his stay at their establishment.

I had inquired of my husband, upon the first opportunity, the reason of Zoubiroff's sudden dismissal. He replied that he had never dismissed him at all, but that the valet had, as it were, been spirited away in the most mysterious manner imaginable.

Whilst Hugo was in Paris, it appeared, Zoubiroff had gone out as usual to do a few commissions for his master. From this expedition, however, he had never returned, nor had he been seen or heard of since that day. Hugo knew that Zoubiroff owned a lodging-house in Paris where he had established his wife, a woman who had once

lived with the Prince's sister as lady's-maid. To this place he sent at once to make inquiries, but all that Madame Zoubioff could tell him, was, that upon the previous day her husband had never made his appearance, and that soon after the time at which he usually visited her, some strange men, belonging, she believed, to the secret police, had presented themselves at the apartments and had searched carefully amongst his effects, taking with them, when they departed, not only all the private papers they could find, but also several articles of wearing-apparel, which he had left in her charge when he had passed through Paris at different times.

The Prince could only explain this strange circumstance by supposing that his valet, like so many of his countrymen, had associated himself with some secret society dangerous to the French or Russian Govern-

ment, or else that the case was one of mistaken identity.

Had Hugo been remaining on in Paris he said that he should certainly have instituted further inquiries. As it was, however, he was so impatient to keep his appointment with me, at Nice, that he could not bring himself to delay his departure, and he had thought it wiser, for the strict maintenance of our secret, not to furnish Madame Zoubiroff with his present address. He had accepted, therefore, the services of an intelligent young man, one of the *employés* of the hotel at which he was staying, who had begged him to take him as his valet upon trial. Later on, he hoped to be able to obtain tidings of his missing servant. I inquired of my husband, also, whether his negotiations with Mr. Marks had ended satisfactorily? He replied that Mr. Marks had just established himself at

the home of the Crecszoleskis; that he appeared to be pleased with everything; and had been most obliging and considerate upon every subject.

At Delphine's suggestion, Hugo had paid a hurried visit to the *château*, having heard that Mrs. Marks was in a delicate state of health, and being anxious to put in hand a few improvements which would be conducive to her comfort. Mr. Marks had since decided, however, not to take his wife to Poland at this inclement season. Curiously enough, the Prince said, she was now staying at Nice; but as she was to join her husband in the spring, he did not regret that he had been enabled to set the place in better order.

All this he had heard through his sister. He, himself, had never had any personal interview with either Mr. Marks or his wife; so that, although this lady was now

so near a neighbour, there would be no fear of her knowing him by sight, or commenting upon any circumstance which might lead to the discovery of our secret. Besides which, the Villa St. Hippolyte was, fortunately, quite out of the way of the town. . .

I know not in what words I can convey to the reader any notion of the extreme beauty of this same St. Hippolyte and its surroundings, without seeming to be over-enthusiastic. The climate of Nice, close to the shores of "the changeful Mediterranean," is frequently treacherous and harsh, and in spite of a burning sun the east wind, bringing with it clouds of blinding dust, seems to be lying in ambush at the corner of almost every street and by-way, ready to fly in the face of its victim.

But away from the sea-shore, up in the lovely country which is but little known to

the tourist, the air is as soft and balmy as that of the Isles of Greece. Beneath the shade of the grey olive-trees, which, gnarled and twisted, bear often the burden of several centuries, the fertile soil is teeming with luxuriant vegetation. One by one, as the early spring days wear on, new and varied blossoms open their eyes to the sunlight. The purple anemone first, as harbinger of the brighter scarlet variety, which, rare at the beginning, and eagerly seized upon as a prize, warms the terraced hill-slope with ruddy patches as the days go by. The narcissus is the next to awaken from the sleep of an indulgent winter; then the great purple and yellow flags, or *fleurs de lis*, amongst their fluted blades of pointed foliage, and then the violets make their appearance in countless numbers, filling the soft air with their fragrance.

As the weather grew warmer, Hugo and

I would often wander in these pleasant flowery places. Little pathways led through the olive-grounds at the back of the old palace, and up into the mountains beyond. The ascent was so gradual—so masked by twisted stems and branches, that it was quite a surprise to us, at first, upon reaching an open space, to look down the valley and see how far we were above the smiling town, the white houses of which we beheld in what seemed quite the far distance, by the shore of the bluest of blue seas.

Sometimes we came upon the primitive dwelling-places of the peasant proprietors, perched picturesquely in a sheltered spur of the mountain, with wine-press and olive-mill all complete, seeming—to my English eyes, more like rough stables than human habitations, and recalling to my mind the little houses and towers that I remembered to have seen depicted in some of the back-

grounds of the early Italian masters, whose works I had admired in the London galleries.

As we wandered thus, there came into my mind, for the first time, a consciousness and appreciation of the old Pagan spirit, associating man and his pigmy heart-beats with the sublimer pulsations of Nature—which died so hard, if, indeed, it has ever really died—before the teachings of more modern creeds :—

“ And old Silenus, shaking a green stick
Of lilies, and the wood-gods in a crew
Came, blithe, as in the olive copses thick
Cicadæ are, drunk with the noonday dew ;
And Driope and Faunus followed quick,
Teasing the god to sing them something new.”

These were the classic shapes I was prepared to see lurking amongst the shadows, and I half-expected to espy the brown goat-foot gods, crouched down amongst the purple irises, and pouring forth the trickling streamlets from their earthen jars.

And all this time, the reader may inquire, did I experience any tenderer feeling for my husband? I know, now, that I was in love with the place—inspired by the passionate and exultant vitality which seemed to be throbbing and expanding around me, and that I was conscious of the romance and mystery of the situation in which I found myself. I was grateful for, and gladdened by, Hugo's admiring devotion—his craving for my society; for to some women, even if they can mete out no very generous measure in return, it is much (so much!) to minister to the happiness of another, even supposing that this other fails in satisfying entirely their own unconscious yearnings!

To Hugo himself, however, apart from all the charm of his accessories, I could never make that absolute surrender which I have learnt since to identify with the intenser

and more passionate forms of human affection. Perhaps, had life ended for me at about this time, I might never have known how different is Love's reckless and unreasoning madness from the calm, complacent, mood, in which I passed these early married days, and there must be many women who leave the world, hourly, in a like blissful ignorance:—

“These questioned not ; silent enduring souls,
Who neither knew the best or worst of life ! ”

During our walks, my husband spoke to me often upon the subject of his religious opinions. He was relieved to find, he said, that I was not wedded to any particular form of bigotry, as was so often the case with Englishwomen, but that I seemed to be open to conviction upon almost every subject;—that Science had performed a mighty work in liberating us from enervating superstitions, but that it did not, of

necessity, follow that those who were the most sceptical with regard to the established creeds, were in consequence, less spiritually minded. With respect to what had hitherto been accepted as truth by the greater part of the civilised world, there had lately arisen, he said, a good deal of discussion; but few had, as yet, been able to elaborate any convenient substitute for "the gods we had out-grown." He was of opinion that, amongst intellectual people, the prevailing spirit was one of scepticism, mingled with a desire to temporise and shirk all personal responsibility; so that they behaved, with regard to all obsolete faiths and fetishisms, very much as he remembered to have heard that a certain economical personage behaved in respect to some of his clothes, which, after his death, were found hoarded up in dark cupboards, and labelled, "Too old to wear, but too good to throw away."

For himself, Hugo said, there were but two questions which possessed any vital importance: Was there a personal Deity—a benevolent Father, who supervised and arranged all our human affairs, who could be moved by our prayers and interested in our actions? and, Was there an after-life, wherein our sensations would sufficiently correspond to those we had previously experienced, in the flesh, to entitle us to be considered in any respect as the same individual who had once walked upon earth? Whilst such questions as these remained unanswered, he said that he could only smile at the absurd “*enfantillages*” of certain learned priests and doctors of divinity, who could condescend to waste both breath and ink in lengthy discussions as to whether the forbidden fruit of Scripture was an apple or a pear; whether the officiating clergyman should

crawl towards the altar like a lizard, or approach it after a more convenient fashion; or whether he should lift or lower the extreme tip of his elbow during the celebration of the Holy Communion !

My husband next spoke to me upon the subject of mesmerism, hypnotism, and clairvoyance, &c. He mentioned, besides, several other "hard names" which I did not remember ever to have heard before. He almost feared, he said, to converse with me upon these matters until my mind had been enlightened by a little preparatory reading, lest I should look upon him as the victim of a monomania. With the view of educating me, however, he had brought with him several books, treating upon these, and other, analogous subjects, which he would give me upon the very earliest opportunity; and, on the evening following upon this conversation, as he was

about to leave me for the night, he asked me to come with him in order that he might give me the books in question. I followed him to his room, and looked, with mingled feelings of shyness and curiosity, at all the unfamiliar manly things that I beheld for the first time. He searched in a portmantau for the books, and, having found them, handed them to me, and begged that I would read them with attention. I saw that two of the books were in German—a language of which I possessed, at this time, only a rudimentary knowledge. I told Hugo this, but he said that I might be able to understand them with the help of a dictionary; if not, he would endeavour to obtain for me an English translation as soon as possible.

The titles of the books were certainly somewhat alarming; they ran thus:—

“A Journal of Cerebral Physiology and

Mesmerism," by T. Zoist (in thirteen vols.), Vol. I.

"Subversion of Materialism," by Prebendary J. Dennis.

"On Force and its Mental Correlates," by Charles Bray.

"Physiologie, Médecine, et Métaphysique du Magnétisme," par J. Charpignon.

"La Clef des Grands Mystères," par Eliphas Levi.

"Die Sympathetisch Magnetische Heilkunde." J. Scheible.

"Von der alten und neuen Magie Ursprung, Idee, Umfang, und Geschichte." Georg Conrad Horst.

"You must read each day a portion of one of these books, my Helen," he said, "and you will then learn to understand better the dreams and ambitions of your husband."

Then he kissed me, and bade me good-night, and I stole back, through the deserted rooms, with my armful of occult literature.

CHAPTER XVI.

MY mesmeric and spiritualistic reading, supplemented by Hugo's explanations, enabled me, ere long, to form some idea of what he had spoken of as his dreams and ambitions. Without allowing myself to be influenced by what Mr. Collingwood had told me, to the effect that both my husband and his sister were "a little mad," I certainly found it difficult to follow the Prince in some of his ærial flights. His dreams struck me as being altogether dreams—fantastic and impracticable; his ambitions impossible of attainment, and therefore

profitless. I perceived that he was a mystic—that he listened to voices (as my godfather had said) which nobody else could hear; but his character seemed to be so generous and tractable, his mind so just and unprejudiced, and his heart so entirely my own, that I had no wish to quarrel with him for holding opinions which, as yet, I was unable either to share or to comprehend.

Those that I could grasp with less difficulty, had reference to the social intercourse of daily life, and to the salutary or baneful effects which may be produced, upon highly sensitive organisations, by their human surroundings.

Some of these ideas, I believe, are shared by a religious community styling themselves “the Brotherhood of the New Life,” although I never heard that my husband had had any connection with them. I pos-

sessed myself, the result of certain physical experiences, some notions of the same kind, but it had never occurred to me to formulate them, as I should scarcely have known how to distinguish my real impressions from those that were purely imaginary.

Hugo, however, being, as he informed me, constitutionally sensitive to mesmeric influences, had had the consideration of this subject forced upon him, having been, he said, actually paralysed, at times, in what he termed his "volitional power" by a nature stronger, in several respects, than his own, with which it had been his fate to be perpetually brought in contact. He had endeavoured, as soon as he fully realised the extent of this domination, to escape from it by various means. But, in spite of the power which he could obtain over some gentler natures, he was, in this case, utterly helpless, and had finally come to regard this

particular person as his absolute controller.

It had occurred to him, however, that, could he only fortify and vitalise himself by a threefold union of mind, body, and soul, with a being strong enough to renew the forces capable of being thus absorbed and withdrawn, he might be enabled, perhaps, successfully to counteract this previous subjection of spirit, and return to his normal condition. He alluded to this second influence as a sort of "cross-mesmerisation," productive sometimes, he informed me, of "a state of absolute mental chaos," and dangerous, for this reason, in cases where the limits of the *rapport* about to be established had not been carefully defined and considered.

There were, however, he said, so many difficulties in his path, that, at the time of our meeting, he had almost abandoned the

idea as impossible of realisation. Women who would surrender to another all that it was in their power to give, nobody would have despaired of finding. But when a weak and irresponsible being pours forth her whole soul, or delivers her feeble individuality into the keeping of the man she professes to love, it is merely as if one were to deluge a wine cask with white rain-water. She gives him, not of her strength but of her weakness. He becomes merely the recipient of what she has found worthless and ineffectual in herself. But then,—Hugo continued,—he had already experienced the disadvantages attendant upon an association with an imperious and uncompromising will! Where would it be possible for him to discover the being who should possess, in a proper proportion, the qualities to be desired, and who would exercise her

dominion discreetly, wisely — above all, *mercifully*?

“*Nowhere!*” was the sad answer that seemed always to come to him whenever he asked himself this question; and so, as he informed me upon the occasion of his first visit to Northover, neither marriage nor affection had entered into the programme of his existence, and all women had seemed to him to be “like dolls,” until he had found himself seated by my side in the tea-room at Ingleby Grange. He perceived in me then, he said—or he had imagined that he had perceived—a certain mixture of wisdom and ignorance, of helplessness and self-reliance, which had impressed him as he had never been impressed by anything of the kind before. He saw that I was possessed of “one of those exceptional feminine natures” that are capable of standing alone intellectually—

that I could form an independent judgment, trust to the penetration of my own mind, and that I should have no need to fasten upon other intellects and derive my sustenance from them like a vampire. I should take from another only what I required to complete my own nature, and *affection* was all that I unconsciously put forth my will to obtain.

There was a legend in his family, he said, to the effect that the dominion over the minds of others, which was peculiar to his race, would cease to exist in the individual who should experience the passion of love in its utmost intensity. "When thou shalt give over thy heart, thy mind, and thy soul, into the keeping of one that thou lovest utterly with thy threefold nature, then shall thine enemies obtain the dominion over thee." So ran the legend.

He assured me, however, that he had

never felt any such love as this for the "doll" women he had previously fallen in with, and he had fancied that it would be impossible for him ever to experience it in the future, until he had met with the one being whom he believed to be capable of "completing and regenerating" his whole nature.

He told me that, previous to our marriage, he had endeavoured to test the power of my intellect and my "volition," and that he had found himself capable, in most instances, of maintaining that ascendancy which ought always to be the portion of the husband. It was with this object that he had exerted his magnetic influence at the ball, and had "willed," afterwards, that I should meet him in the old summer-house at a particular hour. I told him that I had decided to go there of my own accord, urged by a combination of circumstances

with which his "volition" could have had no connection whatever : and that, even the inclination, thus awakened, had abandoned me long before the hour of the proposed meeting. He replied that this might possibly be explained by the fact that, as soon as he became certain of proceeding to London, he had felt that it would be useless to put forward any further effort of will.

But his object, he said, was not, now, to prove that he was the stronger of us two. He desired, on the contrary, to make me an admission which he would hesitate to make to any other woman living. He then confessed to me—speaking with some emotion—that he found himself completely at my mercy. All his boasted philosophy, he said, had failed him for the first time. He loved me utterly and entirely, with all the love of which his being was capable. His will, his "magnetism," had all departed

from him; he had surrendered his existence into my hands!

Seeing that he appeared to be really alarmed as to the consequences which might ensue upon this departure from his original plan, I said all that I could to reassure him. He told me that the family tradition, about falling into the power of his enemies, was not what disturbed him. He regarded this merely as a salutary warning, directed, in the abstract, against the allurements of the Delilahs of life—syrens with whom the warrior might dally whilst his sword was rusting in its scabbard, his charger stamping in its stall, and whilst the foemen were even at the city gate. His apprehensions arose from a sense of his present inability to counteract, and withstand, the power to which he had previously alluded, should he find himself, as might happen at any moment, once more within reach of its

influence. I asked him if this power was wielded by a person who was his enemy? He replied, No; that the influence was not intentionally malignant, and that it had, on some occasions, been exerted for his benefit, but that it had always had the effect of paralysing his will, and of rendering him helpless as an infant. All he had desired was, to be enabled to encounter the person who exercised it upon a footing of equality; to be no longer a puppet in the hands of another. But now, his strength was gone; he had no weapon wherewith to defend himself! . . .

I told him, in spite of my being unable, wholly, to comprehend his fears, that if, indeed, his will had been surrendered into my hands, it should be my mission to meet, and combat, the paralysing influence to which he had referred. He said that, if I could only do this, all would be well; he

should then cast from him, for ever, the mortifying memories of the past, and resign himself to his present happiness, which was greater than anything he could have before imagined.

I was rejoiced to think that it was in my power to minister thus to my husband's happiness. Ever since I had arrived at woman's years, I had been possessed of an intense craving to protect, to soothe, to comfort, some being whose life could be made brighter by my sympathy and friendship. That Hugo should cling to me thus seemed to count, in my eyes, as one of the greatest of his merits.

He asked me, frequently, whether I was certain that I cared for him, and told me that, if so, I could not remind him too often of my affection, since, in this respect, he "was like a woman,"—deriving strength and encouragement from spoken assurances, and

never wholly free from apprehension that the discovery of some of his numerous defects might make a difference in my heart.

I told him, what was then no more than the truth, that I perceived in him none of the defects to which he alluded; that I cared for him more than I had ever cared for anybody else; that I was proud of, and grateful for, his affection, and that I looked forward to the day when we should be able to avow our marriage.

He seemed, however, to be always a little mistrustful, even after my repeated assurances, telling me that, "for a woman who was really in love," I "kept my head" as he had never known a woman keep it before in like case. I have since thought that, perhaps, he could read my heart better than I then knew how to read it myself!

Once the Prince inquired of me, very

earnestly, what discovery would be the most likely to estrange a woman's affection from the man she had previously loved? what defects in his character would be certain to render him for ever hateful in her eyes?

I considered for some time before replying, and then said that I thought the discovery of meanness, cowardice, or untruthfulness—the defects, in fact, of a bad woman—was what would render a man contemptible in my eyes, and that I fancied it would be impossible to love a man one utterly despised, although one might forgive those faults which resulted from misdirected impulse, however serious their consequences.

We were driving together, when the Prince asked me this question, along the lovely road which lies between Nice and Villafranca. We had started upon our way accompanied by Miss Warden, to save ap-

pearances, but had deposited her on the *Promenade des Anglais*, intending to pick her up on our homeward way, three not being, as she had herself remarked, a very convenient number for private conversation.

I noticed that Hugo seemed strangely anxious that I should explain more fully the significance of my words.

He took my hand in his, looked earnestly in my face, and asked me whether, by "meanness," I intended to refer to a want of generosity with regard to money, and whether, by "cowardice," and "untruthfulness," I meant that kind of moral timidity which might spring from an excusable desire to spare another person the pain of some unpleasant avowal, or a want of physical courage to face and combat assailing dangers?

I replied that I was not thinking of

meanness merely in connection with money, since a person might have some generous motive for the practice of economy; but that by "meanness, cowardice, and untruthfulness," I meant rather the traducing of a friend behind his back, the striking of a man when he was down, and the conscious misrepresentation of facts from interested and selfish motives.

The Prince became somewhat pensive and silent after this, but I did not think that my answer could have either pained or annoyed him, for he continued to hold my hand in his until the end of our *tête-à-tête*, saying that he derived "courage, consolation, and hope" from the contact.

I drew off my glove, being proud of my beautiful cat's-eye ring, and, thinking to make him smile, clenched my fist with mock ferocity, and told him that whilst I was by his side to defend him, and to

combat the sinister influence to which he had just alluded, he need be in no fear of falling into the power of his enemies. But he only looked graver than before, and I perceived that he regarded this subject as one that was much too serious to jest about.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON the evening following upon this drive, as I was sitting with my husband in the drawing-room, the door leading into the passage quietly opened and Mason emerged unexpectedly from behind the folds of the *portière*.

It happened that Hugo had come to me, upon this occasion, by way of the balcony, which extended from his room to ours, and so in at the window, in order to avoid all noise, and I suppose it was the making of this slight change in his programme which had caused him to forget to secure the door.

Upon beholding Prince Crecszoleski seated familiarly by my side upon the sofa, arrayed in his sable-trimmed toga—obviously the costume of the bed-chamber—the poor woman was naturally transfixed with horror and amazement. She stood for some seconds contemplating us in silence, and then, after murmuring “Oh, Miss Helen!” in a voice full of reproach and consternation, she burst into a flood of tears.

We both rose simultaneously to our feet. To my intense relief, Hugo at once told her the truth. “We have been married since the month of October, Mrs. Mason,” he said, “so there is no occasion for uneasiness. But for your master’s precarious condition, and the doctor’s recommendation to avoid all that might agitate him, we should have made our confession before now. I must hope that you will feel dis-

posed to be as good a friend to me, in the future, as you have proved to my wife in the past."

The news seemed to surprise her greatly. She had been generally in such close attendance upon Sir Harry that she had had no opportunity of observing our growing intimacy, and her ignorance of French had prevented her from understanding any of the gossiping remarks which it might have occasioned in the hotel. Her unexpected appearance, therefore, had not been due to any suspicion upon her part. She had merely come to borrow some wood, and firecones, for Sir Harry's fire, as he was feeling a little chilly. Hugo begged her, for the present, to treat his communication as confidential.

As soon as we were once more alone, I asked my husband whether he really meant soon to declare our marriage? He replied

that in this, as in all things, he would be guided entirely by me. I was pleased and flattered at this patient subservience to my will, which I had observed, of late, often followed upon some desire of mine to which I had not even given audible expression.

Perhaps, I have since thought, having learnt how rare it is for a man to assume, after marriage, the submissive manner of a lover, I may not have seemed sufficiently grateful for this voluntary departure from the generally approved male tactics. As yet, however, I was not experienced enough to know that his behaviour was at all exceptional. Woman in the arrogance of her youth and beauty, and man in the consciousness of his strength, are apt to be somewhat exacting, and to accept, as a matter of course, those good gifts which appear to them, in after years, in the light of generous concessions. In these days, how-

ever, I was neither in a position to analyse nor to make comparisons. I have made them since, with the result of summoning tears to my eyes, and vain regrets to my heart ; and in order that I may absolve my conscience from this suspicion of seeming ingratitude, I have tried to believe that Hugo's tender and obedient demeanour may have been partly involuntary. That he might, perhaps, have endeavoured to dominate and dictate, like any other husband, but that being, as he termed it, "a sensitive" and influenced by me in his "volitional power," he recognised his own inability to combat and oppose my wishes. In a word, that his docility may have been as much a result of mesmerism as of affection. But I am as ignorant, now, upon this subject, as I was then.

Before parting for the night, we had agreed that, upon the morrow, Sir Harry

should be informed of our marriage. It had been previously arranged that on this day we were to make an expedition to Monaco, or Monte Carlo, as it is more generally called. We now settled that, after driving there in the morning, breakfasting at the Hôtel de Paris, and looking on for a little while at the gambling, Miss Warden and I should stroll about in the grounds, leaving my father and Hugo seated together upon the terrace, and that there the Prince should gradually break the news of the important step we had taken.

As I desired, in spite of the displeasure which I felt certain that I should incur, to inform my godfather of it also, and as the Prince had, as yet, confided in no member of his own household except in Zoubiroff, the cause of whose sudden disappearance remained still a mystery, I asked him whether he would not like, before communi-

cating our secret to Sir Harry, to confide in his sister Delphine, in order that she might not feel wounded at his reticence towards her once our marriage became publicly known?

A cloud passed over his brow at the mention of this name. I had noticed before that, in spite of his professed affection for her, allusions to his sister seemed to awaken memories which were not altogether agreeable, and, for this reason, I had generally changed the conversation before I had obtained much definite information respecting a person to whom I had become so nearly related.

I now inquired of Hugo who his sister had married; whether she had any children; and whether he thought that she would approve of our union, and that we should all be good friends? He replied—his face still wearing an unaccountable expression of pain—that his sister had married when

very young, a man old enough to have been her father, one General Dobrowolski, with whom, however, he believed that she had lived happily until his death, which occurred only a few years after the marriage. She had then remained a widow for a while, residing chiefly in Paris and Vienna, and occasionally at her old home. Eventually, however, she had re-married. This time her marriage was not so happy. Her husband, although both wealthy and learned, was beneath her in position. The marriage had not been pleasing to her family. Neither by this union, nor by the former one, had she had any children, and she was now, for the second time, a widow.

I remarked to my husband that, as his sister's second marriage had been displeasing to him, she would hardly be in a position to criticise, or complain of, his own, and that I thought no time ought to be lost before

writing to inform her of it. To this he replied that some women were strange, unreasonable, over-sensitive beings, and that it was impossible for him to predict how even his own sister might behave in a case like the present. He did not imagine for a moment that she would see any cause for objection, but she was deeply attached to him, and had always shown herself to be, to a certain extent, jealous of his affection. Also, she was in the position of his heir, and had been accustomed to take an active part in the management of his estates. On the whole, therefore, Hugo said that he would prefer to wait until he could make sure of a personal interview with her. She visited Paris almost every year at Easter. On our way back to England he would make an appointment with her there, and would then tell her of the change he had made in his existence, instead of writing.

“ But this is no reason why you should not confide in our good friend, George,” he added, in response, as it seemed, to my earnest inward desire; “ for as my good friend I shall continue to count him, although he believes me to be little better than a harmless maniac! But for his hospitality I should never, perhaps, have met with my beloved Helen. George Collingwood has earned my eternal gratitude! ”

Hugo then spoke to me, almost for the first time, of his parents. His mother, he said, was a wife after the pattern of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, “ imbued with all the Manichean asceticism of the saints of the Middle Ages,” and who had come under the influence of a priest as arbitrary and bigoted as Conrad of Marpurg. In her desire to attain to the ideal of apostolic holiness, she separated herself from her husband, in spite of her deep affection for

him, having persuaded herself that those family ties to which we all of us owe our existence, were merely degrading snares of the Evil One, which it was our duty to resist and forego. She sought, therefore, the sanctuary of a convent shortly after the birth of her daughter, where, in spite of the repeated entreaties of her husband, she lived for over eight years in pious retreat. At the end of this time, how, and wherefore, it was impossible to explain after all the years that had elapsed, she was induced once more to resume her married life, and the Prince her husband was rejoiced, some two years afterwards, by the birth of a son, for which event he had most ardently longed. His satisfaction, however, was but of short duration. This son cost his mother her life, and his father soon afterwards followed her to the grave.

“I am the child, therefore,” said Hugo,

in conclusion, " of my father's passionate desire—of my mother's reluctant surrender. The poor woman would have wished me to have been born entirely of the Spirit, and there have been moments in my life when I have felt that there was in my nature an intense sympathy with the inhabitants of an unseen world. Then, my father's practical, material, nature, is triumphant. I descend from the cold regions of the clouds and resign myself with enthusiastic eagerness to the allurements of earth. My sister, the first child of this incongruous union, is possessed of a more masculine nature. Like her father, she is resolute, self-reliant, fearless, and strongly imbued with the materialistic spirit; and yet *she*, too, has her inspired moments — her admonitions from the invisible world! It is curious to observe how we are all made up of contradictions; surely we can scarcely de-

signate a person as 'an individual' when so many opposing individualities are making war in his blood! As Eugene Sue has said, 'To comprehend everything is to forgive all!'

I now thought that I had probably penetrated the mystery which had seemed to me, hitherto, to envelope the existence of Hugo's sister, and that I could account satisfactorily for the cloud which was wont to appear upon his brow at the mention of her name. She was an eccentric, self-willed woman, at whose hands he had probably suffered many things, "strongly imbued with the materialistic spirit," and she had made an undesirable second marriage which had displeased her family.

Was she the person who had dominated him? I wondered; who represented the influence "stronger in several respects" than his own with which he had told me

that it had been his fate to "be perpetually brought in contact"; which had had the effect of paralysing his "volitional power," and which it was my appointed mission to mitigate and counteract? Some day, no doubt, all would be made plain to me, and, in the meantime, I did not think that it would be generous on my part to cross-question my husband upon what was evidently an unpleasant subject.

I wrote to my godfather by the early post upon the following day, and experienced a sense of relief when I knew that my letter had actually started upon its way. I felt, however, that I must not indulge in unalloyed satisfaction until I knew in what spirit Sir Harry would receive the intelligence which was to be communicated to him later on in the day, and I could not help looking forward to our expedition to Monte Carlo with a good deal of anxiety.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I HAVE often wondered whether there is really anything in what is called "a presentiment of evil" or not? Many others have, doubtless, wondered likewise; or have endeavoured to connect the gloomy forebodings which have, at times, oppressed them, with some definite calamity which may afterwards have come to pass.

For my own part, I am inclined to think that misfortunes are apt to come upon us unexpectedly, "shod with silence," and numbing us with the shock of a surprise; and I even hold a kind of superstitious

belief that, to anticipate an evil, goes some way towards preventing it.

Be this as it may, beyond a natural anxiety as to the result of Hugo's communication to my father, I do not remember experiencing any marked sense of dread or uneasiness upon the morning of this particular day. I had risen betimes, and, after writing my letter to Mr. Collingwood, I wandered forth into the old Italian garden, before Miss Warden had made her appearance.

This garden—which I have never beheld since these days of my early married life, and which it is unlikely that I shall ever behold again—if it be true that it is now portioned out into building lots—was a delicious dream of luxuriant southern beauty. It was disposed in shady terraces, ornamented with roughly sculptured mediæval seats and figures, whence the town of Nice, with the blue Mediterranean beyond, could

be seen outspread in glittering panorama. At the back of the old palace, the higher peaks of the snow mountains were sparkling in the morning sun ; whilst to right and left, rose the grey, olive-clad hills, amongst which Hugo and I had so often wandered.

The intense beauty of this scene, combined, as it was, with a perfect climate, inspired me with a physical joy in living which was altogether new to me. My soul became flooded with tender emotion, and, turning towards the house, I gazed up at Hugo's windows, wishing that he would come out and join me in the garden. As I was looking thus, with this wish for him in my heart, he threw back the green shutters and stepped out upon the balcony.

I suppose that I possess one of those natures that can love best what I know to be really my own ; what I can take without let or hindrance, or self-reproach, to my

heart; the reverse, in fact, of what I have "heard tell" of the male disposition. In spite of my liking for the romantic and exceptional aspects of existence, I was heartily tired, now, of prevarications and concealments. I had gone through all the excitement which usually accompanies an intrigue, and was familiar with most of the subterfuges consequent upon a clandestine marriage; but I realised, at this moment, that I should probably feel a warmer and deeper affection for my lover once I could openly acknowledge him as my husband, and that I did not take any additional pleasure in his society because he had occasionally come to me through the window instead of the door. Was it the crisp inspiring air of the morning, the perfume of violets and orange-blossom, the glimpses of far mountain and blue ocean? I know not. Although such combinations may tend, at times, to lend an

unsuspected bias to our mood. I know, however, as I look back to this day, that I had never come so near to loving Hugo Crecszoleski as upon this particular morning. He perceived me immediately, made a sign that he did so, and in a few minutes he was standing beside me upon the terrace. It was a moment that I shall remember as long as I live, however much I may desire to forget it.

He took my hand, and I felt, at once, that he both understood and shared my emotion. Who can tell, had events been ordered differently, of what new and undisturbed contentment this sense of mutual sympathy might not have made the beginning? *Something*,—a shadow a suspicion, an unaccountable feeling of painful anticipation and restraint, had seemed, until now, to stand between my husband and myself. I hoped that this was about to

lift and disperse, like the mists of the morning. It had been occasioned, I fancied, by the exceptional position in which I had found myself placed, and by all the mystery and insincerity resulting therefrom. A calmer, brighter existence was about to unfold before me, and I was experiencing, to-day, the first manifestations of this new state. I know not, wholly, whether I ought to rejoice, or to lament, because my impression turned out to be a wrong one. Life is so strange, with its surprises, its contrasts, its vague and unprofitable regrets. *Mine* must have been altogether different, of course, had I become the sport of different circumstances. My affections, my ambitions, my failings, would have been all other than they are, and my story, it may be, even less worthy than now of note or record.

“We judge others,” George Eliot says,

"according to results. How else? Not knowing the process by which results are arrived at."

Could we but comprehend this "process," and thus direct the course of these "results," man would be lord of creation, indeed, and stand in need of no higher guidance!

As had been previously arranged, we started upon our expedition at about ten o'clock, and upon our arrival at Monte Carlo, breakfasted at the Hôtel de Paris. The beauty of the place charmed and fascinated me. I said to myself that when our marriage had been declared and acknowledged, I should ask Hugo to bring me here again, from time to time, in order that we might drink in warmth and sunshine whilst it was winter in our English home. For that we should have a home in England, some day, Hugo had seemed quite confident,—ever since his negotiations

with Mr. Marks had taken such a satisfactory turn.

My father's voice recalled me to the present as I was musing thus.

"This is a first-rate place," he remarked, addressing himself to Hugo, "for a fine young bachelor like you, but an old fellow like me feels rather like a fish out of water amongst all these gay folks!"

"I hope not to remain a bachelor, always," returned the Prince with a glance towards the place where I was sitting; "and I hope, too, when I am married, not to be cut off, for that reason, from all pleasant places, which should, in such happy circumstances, seem to become only the more enjoyable."

He spoke, as he usually did, in a somewhat stilted and elaborate manner. I felt, however, that he meant what he said, and, as I agreed cordially with the sentiments

expressed, I sent him a kindly glance across the little marble table at which we were taking coffee after our luncheon.

“Don’t ever marry, Prince,” Sir Harry went on, with the manner of one who had given the subject his most serious consideration, “women are all sly cats; they’ve no shame, no honour, no compassion! The gentler, the kinder, the more grateful and humble they seem, the more ready are they to betray you or stab you in the back! If I had been as good a hand with my pen as I was, once, with my gun, I think I should have set down all their badness in a book, and then printed it, and shot myself afterwards, perhaps! But it’s too late, now, to talk of what one would have done once. Only, you, Prince, take the advice of an old man. Use them for your own pleasure as long as they can amuse you, and then fling them upon one side; for, believe me,

they're none of them worth keeping! And above all, don't be fool enough to marry one of them, and let her creep into your heart! Women are sly cats!"

My father's tones had grown in bitterness as he went on. I was at a loss to imagine what could so suddenly have aroused him from his usual torpor to this pitch of angry denunciation. At the same time, I was not altogether sorry that Hugo should become aware of the strange alternations of mood to which Sir Harry was occasionally subject. It was far better that, as my husband, he should know precisely how I had been situated at home; and it would make him careful, too, in the future, to avoid saying or doing anything which might call forth these ebullitions of ill-humour.

Miss Warden, in a discreet "aside," whispered to me that she attributed this unexpected outburst to the cup of black coffee

and the *petit verre* of "*fine champagne*" of which Sir Harry had rashly partaken. We had been repeatedly warned that stimulants were bad for him ; but he had seemed so much better of late, that, in a public place, we had not liked to subject him to any restrictions.

In order to turn the subject, Hugo now proposed, with great tact, that we should go and look on at the gambling. We asked him if he intended to play himself? He replied; Yes, for a wonder, just to see whether he was in luck or not. I, too, had come prepared to risk at least a Napoleon at the tables, with the same object. Miss Warden, who confessed, now, that she had always been conscious that a wild passion for gambling had lain dormant in her secret soul for years, was determined to yield to it,—just this once, and to hazard a five-franc piece. The proceeds of this first

crime—for such she said she felt it to be—(supposing there were any,) were to go towards swelling the funds for the new English church, which was just then in course of erection within sight of where we were sitting.

After settling our account with the waiter, we were about to rise from our places, when Hugo suddenly changed colour, and, turning to me, said, in an agitated undertone—

“No! Helen; I shall not tempt fortune to-day—neither at the tables nor in any other manner! I should have no chance this morning; I am not in luck; the Seven Sleepers have turned!”

I had come to know the meaning of this figurative speech. It had reference to the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, who, according to ancient tradition, turned over upon their sides whenever any calamity threatened Christendom. Hugo—who, as I was

now aware, held many curious opinions—did not consider the legend altogether in the light of a myth. He had told me that he regarded their sleep as a mesmeric trance, and believed that they might have turned occasionally in the course of it. When, therefore, he said “the Seven Sleepers have turned,” he meant to convey that he fancied he was menaced by some stroke of bad luck.

Whilst my father—who remained sitting at the little round table from which the rest of our party had risen—stared vacantly at the gaily-dressed figures that went flitting to and fro in the sunshine, the Prince whispered in my ear that he thought it would be imprudent to broach the subject of our marriage whilst Sir Harry was in such an irritable mood. He would go into the *Sal'e de Jeu*, he said, and see if there were any places at the tables, returning to fetch us if

he found that the company was "not too objectionable." He left us hereupon, and went off in the direction of the Casino.

I gazed after him as he went; and, as I watched his tall, graceful, figure, passing out into the full sunlight and crossing the broad gravel walk, experienced something like pride as I contrasted this distinguished-looking man—my husband—with some of the other visitors assembled upon the terrace. His appearance seemed to excite the notice, and—as I fondly imagined—the admiration of most of these. Several of the prettily-dressed ladies looked back at him from under their lace parasols, after he had passed; and two men in particular, who were loitering about the entrance to the Casino, nudged one another as he went in at the door, and exchanged a few remarks, as I fancied, to the Prince's advantage. All this pleased and gratified me. As I

have already admitted, I was, upon this particular day, in an unusually susceptible and emotional state; but, whatsoever her mood, it must always be gratifying, I should think, to a woman when she recognizes the physical attractions of the husband she has chosen, and when she is conscious that other people are aware of them also. Esteem and respect, we are told, should rest upon a more solid foundation; but, be this how it may, I was glad to know upon this sunny February morning that Hugo was, outwardly, so good to look upon; and I think if I was ever really fond of him that I was fond of him then.

“Good-looking fellow!” remarked Sir Harry, rousing himself from his reverie, and seeming also to be impressed with my husband’s comeliness; “but if he’s making love to you, Nelly, we shall have to give him the cold shoulder! Your husband was

chosen for you very soon after you were born."

"You mean Courtenay Davenant," I said; "but indeed, indeed papa, that can never be! Besides, Courtenay was against it himself. He objected to the marriage of first cousins."

"Young people are fools, miss!" returned Sir Harry, sharply. "I heard all he had to say against it in London, and, after giving him a few pages of family history, I brought him round to my way of thinking. It's uncommonly lucky that he ended by taking my view, as it's the only way of making everything straight and comfortable for you both!"

He did not pause for a reply, but turned his back upon us abruptly; and, adjusting some field-glasses which he had brought with him, seemed to become absorbed in a contemplation of the far sea-view.

I thought how differently these words, which he had just uttered, would have affected me only a few months ago—before I had taken the law into my own hands, and arranged the plan of my existence according to my own notions. How wounded I should have felt at the idea that Courtenay should have been talked over by my father and “brought round” (much against his will, no doubt, and entirely from motives of self-interest) to his “way of thinking.” This veering round again, upon my cousin’s part, to the original family scheme, accounted (I thought) for his proposal to visit Northover, and for the card which had been left upon me on the very morning of my wedding.

I had no wish to annoy my father by saying anything more upon the subject. When it would be safe for us to declare our marriage, I did not know. I should be of age,

however, in the following December, and before that time, something might turn up to make our path easier. For the moment, I only experienced a sense of unalloyed triumph, and I smiled towards the place where Miss Warden was standing, with the smile of one who has confounded, by her own prowess, the selfish machinations of her persecutors.

As I was musing thus, I saw Hugo emerge from the doorway of the Casino. He had scarcely passed out into the sunshine, however, before one of the two men I had already observed, stepped forward, and laid hold of his coat collar. Almost simultaneously, the second man seized him by the right arm. The Prince started, and ejaculated something, but we were too far off to catch his words.

It all happened in a moment. Miss Warden and I looked on in the greatest

amazement, scarcely believing the testimony of our own eyes

My father was still looking through his glasses in the direction of the Mediterranean, and so saw nothing of what was happening.

The two men who had hold of Hugo now led him quickly in the direction of the hotel at which we had breakfasted. As they came near to where we stood,—petrified with astonishment, he made a sign to them to stop.

“I am arrested,” he whispered, in a hurried and agitated voice, holding out to me the only hand that was free, as though to grasp mine for comfort.

I made up my mind, at once, that it must be, of course, a case of mistaken identity, and that as soon as the detectives,—for detectives they evidently were,—had interrogated their prisoner, all would be satisfac-

torily explained. I did not attempt, therefore, to sympathise or condole with my husband. It had all happened so suddenly, so unexpectedly, in the course of a few seconds only, that there had not been time for me to collect my ideas. I noticed, when I looked into Hugo's face that it was deadly pale, and thought it strange that he should be so visibly affected by what could only prove to be a provoking error; but, owing to the confusion and bewilderment of my mind, I did not even press his outstretched hand, or murmur one kindly word of farewell.

"*Affaire politique, n'est-ce-pas ?*" the Prince asked, turning to one of the two men who had hold of him. I do not know whether he said this really believing it at the time, or whether he desired merely that I should believe it, and be more reassured in consequence. He had often told me that

the agents of the Russian Government were perpetually taking up innocent persons, on suspicion of being concerned in imaginary conspiracies, and subjecting them to all kinds of temporary annoyance. We had talked upon this subject quite recently, when commenting upon the mysterious disappearance of Zoubioff.

But the detective's answer fell upon me like a thunderbolt.

"*Pardon, mon Prince,*" he said, speaking sternly, but in a tone that was perfectly respectful, "*c'est pour un assassinat*"; and then the two detectives escorted their prisoner into the hotel.

END OF VOL. I.